SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
3 4034 04266 9969

Blair

The new decameron

WITHDRAWN

5440

SACRED HEART
UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

PR
1148
.N4

10 DEC

1.

The
e
B
a
2
5

PR 1148 .N4

The New Decameron

THE NEW DECAMERON

Original Edition

THE NEW DECAMERON

THE FOURTH VOLUME, EDITED BY BLAIR

AND

CONTAINING STORIES BY

J. D. BERESFORD
BLAIR
HORACE HORSNELL
STORM JAMESON
ROBERT KEABLE
D. H. LAWRENCE
EDGELL RICKWORD
MICHAEL SADLEIR
L. A. G. STRONG

BRENTANO'S
NEW YORK

Manufactured and Printed in Great Britain

CONTENTS

		PAGE
THE FOURTH DAY		7
THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S TALE:		
THE BUCKROSS RING .	By L. A. G. STRONG .	40
THE PROFESSOR'S TALE		
THAT SORT OF THING .	By J. D. BERESFORD .	78
THE POET'S TALE		
UNDINE, THE LAST ADVENTURE OF THE CHEVALIER ERRANT . .	By EDGELL RICKWORD	92
THE SCHOOLMARM'S TALE:		
ON ONE OF THE SIDE ALTARS	By BLAIR	112
THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S TALE:		
A MOTHER'S COMEDY .	By MICHAEL SADLEIR .	143
THE BUREAUCRAT'S TALE		
MONOTONY	By STORM JAMESON .	178
THE TALE OF THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND		
THE WATER SPRITE .	By HORACE HORSNELL	195

CONTENTS

PAGE

THE PRIEST'S TALE

THE LATE EXTRA . . . By ROBERT KEABLE 215

THE TALE OF THE LADY OF FASHION

THE LAST LAUGH . . By D. H. LAWRENCE 235

THE MASTER PRINTER'S TALE:

LA DAME AU JARRETIÈRES By BLAIR 262

THE FOURTH DAY

I

THEY used to say, "Synopsis"; but that has already become a term too intellectually snobbish for the days of popular education. To be understanded of the people, we must now write: "*New Readers Begin Here.*"

And old readers?—they who possess at once the first three volumes of *The New Decameron* and none the less the temerity to open the fourth? *O fortitudinos nimium!*—an exclamation on the admission of women to full membership of Oxford University, said to have been made by a Cambridge don, round whom the controversy has since raged, whether he was at fault as Latinist or feminist or both. Old readers begin here too. Old readers may remember with advantages to themselves the *Punch* picture of the old soldier, bored with doing bayonet practice with recruits, complaining that he'd done it already to real Germans; and the sergeant's retort: "That's why the war's lasted four years." Let old readers but complain that they have already read in full in the first three volumes information which is now briefly to

refresh them, and the editor will retort (gracefully and with gratitude) that that is why there is now a fourth volume. . . .

To them it must always have been evident that for Hector Turpin to take eleven people on what he called a " temperamental " foreign tour of six weeks' duration for the sum of five hundred pounds savoured either of business disaster or fraud. Mr. Thomas Cook, even aided by Mr. Cook Junior, with all their vast conjoined experience and resources, would surely never have looked at the proposition on such lines as Turpin conceived it; and he, admittedly, had never done the thing before. Frankly, the only real plan or reckoning that he had made—the extreme length to which his sense of organisation had led him—could almost be summed up in the sinister sentence, *Once aboard the lugger*. . . .

It is true that one of the eleven travellers was only Mrs. Dane-Vereker's maid—that whereas Mrs. Dane-Vereker had paid a hundred pounds for the pair of them the maid would be accommodated in the attics of hotels and never taste their cellars. On the other hand, Herrick, the poet, was getting his tour for nothing, because he had provided the private yacht which had brought the party across the Channel: on Turpin's part, a grossly extravagant price to pay for the crossing—board, lodging, travelling expenses, and tips (probably drinks as well) for six weeks. No doubt Turpin had had some hazy idea of using the yacht for further economical voyaging; but, if so, he might have reflected that a poet who requires to

make such a bargain could never, at his own expense, keep a steam yacht in commission. He must further have reflected that there was at least one member of his party—probably the richest, and certainly the most forceful—Mr. Buck, the master-printer retired, who could not long be kept from the legendary lures of Paris, where the sirens live nowadays—inland. His nose was as sharp as a guillotine, and a' babbled of Red Mills, Bals Bulliers, and the like.

On the face of it you would say (especially if you have kept any account of the meals eaten during the first three days) that the temperamental tourists were committing—by the process known as getting their money's worth—highway robbery upon Turpin himself. Nevertheless, that pathetic figure of an incomplete courier was indeed, professionally, a crook, though this happened to be his first, naturally unbusinesslike attempt to run straight. His initial trouble was, of course, lack of experience. What looked like being his final catastrophe was the evil luck of being " nobbled " by his former chief on the very first day in France.

Turpin was himself temperamental : that was why he used the word. And his temperamentality was now all for respectability. Already he had begun to cling with almost an affectionately dog-like devotion to his English tourists. Hitherto his only link with respectability had been his chance acquaintanceship with Valentine Herrick ; and, while not every poet is necessarily disreputable, nor even every owner of a steam yacht, it will readily be realised that this was a link

unlikely to prove sound. But now! For three days he had lived, in profuse, unpremeditated intimacy, with Britons of the deepest dye. It was he himself who, as a desperate expedient, had set them telling stories in times of inaction, but he had neither deliberated nor dreamed upon the success of his device. Not merely had these difficult clients of his become necessarily intimate among themselves in the course of their tale-telling; but he, Turpin, had become intimate with them. Intimacy with the serenely upper-class group among them—with Mrs. Dane-Vereker, with Peter Brown, with Mr. Vivian Spencer (of the British Foreign Office)—*pouf!* 'twas something, nay, 'twas much; but after all, such people are always the most readily accessible and contingent, whether generically or professionally, to crooks. Each of them an anti-social gang: despoilers of the people and despoilers of the despoilers: *voleurs des terres* and *voleurs des tiares*—there is always a certain degree of unacknowledged familiarity, of constitutional sympathy between them. The same might be said of the priest in the party—the Reverend Anthony Sheppard. Anglican, but calling himself Father Anthony, he would be open at any time to Turpin's confession. But when it came to people like the Professor and his friend the Psychic Researcher, and to Miss Pennock—who was, in fact, a woman doctor: Dr. Pennock—people of Britain's really irreproachable class, the upper-middle professional class; and still more, to the real bourgeois, the one quite unapproachable class—to people like little Miss Pogson and Mr.

Buck: why, then the Courier felt he was indeed arriving. If that mansion of Buck's retirement should have finished building by the time of their return, Mr. Hector Turpin (*alias* . . .?) could already almost himself commence building—on an invitation for a visit.

But that beast Judas had "nobbled" him! Judas had forced him to take his party to the Château de la Hourmerie for the night, in expectation of a plan for plucking them. (As if there was, anyway, much plucking to be done! Not one of the party was really worth while, to a man with Judas's idea of spoils. But Judas was one of those fools who, if he had no trusted subordinate at hand to advise him better, supposed that every English person touring the Continent was necessarily rich . . . just as if they were Americans.) [1]

Fleeting impulses there had been to confess all to his clients—particularly as one of them, Mr. Peter Brown, appeared from the stories he told to be the intimate friend of the great English detective Athelstan Tubbs: he even referred to him as "Tubby"—a thing not the most hardened and daring crook of Turpin's acquaintance had ever dared to do. But confession, while it would mean the loss of his clients and his incipient respectability, would have nothing to set on the credit side; whereas obedience to Judas's orders would leave him at least with the monkey's share of the spoils. And, little regard as he had for the

[1] It even begins to be whispered now, among the really educated circles of France and England, that not every touring American is necessarily a millionaire.

brains of Judas (to think that the fool could go round calling himself " Baron Slessheim " !), poor Turpin had a veritable terror of his concealed ferocity.

These considerations, however, went to the wind at 1 o'clock in the morning of the night spent at La Hourmerie. If he regarded Judas with terror, he now regarded Henry Scott, the Psychic Researcher, with awful superstition. For conceive the man ! The second evening of their tour had been also the second day of story-telling. They had settled down on the terrace of that accursed château, in the moonlight, and at his own suggestion the regulation batch of ten tales had been completed. And then—betwixt twelve and one—that devil, that fiend, that unholy manipulator of the minds of men, had put them all to sleep and willed them into a dream of a complete set of ten more tales, told by him ! Of himself, he had created the tales, had woven them into the sleep of everyone on the terrace (save Mr. Buck, who dreamed, no doubt, indomitably of can-cans and cocottes). Of himself he had wakened them at the striking of one o'clock. And the tales ! They had been personal. They had pictured him, Turpin, eloping with Mrs. Dane-Vereker ! (Ah, what a pang of thought in that ! To such a degree of intimacy had he attained, that such things could be imagined, at least !) They had pictured a prosecution for theft (and indeed Mrs. Dane-Vereker had already had some jewels stolen). They had pictured a terrible scene in the office of a Commissary of Police !

Stories that told of scenes in the offices of Commissaries of Police were not decent. Turpin had already a passable acquaintance with such scenes. And a man—an Englishman—who could know so much—who so vividly could picture such things—a man of such a mind! *Par exemple!* it made nothing safe. He could know anything. Confession! Clean, clean confession! Anything to be on the side of such a man, not against him!

And so he confessed. Of course, he chose his confessional. He contrived to detain Mrs. Dane-Vereker, Mr. Peter Brown (detective's friend!), and Mr. Vivian Spencer, when the rest went bedward, still in a buzz of astonishment at the uncanny skill of Mr. Scott. And the latter, of course, remained, sleepily watchful in his chair. He probably anticipated the clean breast that was coming, thought Turpin. Father Anthony he thought better than to detain: so essentially an amateur himself, he knew better than to confess to a professional, dusty connoisseur of confessions.

II

The Lady of Fashion lightly laughed.

"My dear Monsieur Turpin," she said, "you've pleased me inexpressibly. You've vindicated my judgment of you. I knew I was right!"

"Madame divined, then, that I was a rogue?" inquired the penitent humbly.

"No, no, no! I knew that respectability was your secret passion and that, fundamentally, you were really rather a dear."

Mr. Peter Brown committed himself to an audible clearing of his throat. On ordinary occasions a social offence, like a vulgar roadside advertisement, this simple act may sometimes be a social danger-sign, topping a too-easy descent. And it was so that he meant it.

"One fails perhaps to understand," he observed, "why—in such circumstances—Mr. Turpin should have deferred confession to this particular moment—and, I may add, to this particular group of his proposed victims."

"Mr. Brown is right. I can only explain, with bitterness, that my desire to build up for myself an honest business (on the basis of no capital, not too exorbitant profits, but plenty of good-will) was overcome by my fear of this man Judas. But—to use a phrase that you English have—there is an All-seeing Eye. . . ."

"Pardon me, but if that is your line of appeal," continued Mr. Peter Brown, smoothly interrupting, "had we not better recall Father Anthony?"

"Tchah! Do you not understand?" murmured Turpin, a little complainingly. "I refer, not to *le bon Dieu*, but to *le diable savant*." And here he bowed, in the polished manner which he had always deemed that his part of cosmopolitan courier demanded, to Henry Scott.

Vivian Spencer laughed outright.

"My dear lady," he said good humouredly, "you have professed such faith in the fellow that I think it should be your privilege to tell him of the suspicions that we have been generating against him all day. . . ."

"Yes, Monsieur Turpin," quoth the Lady of Fashion, happy to take up the tale in face of the poor man's blank astonishment. "We have had our suspicions. The loss of my jewels, let me tell you, was a 'put-up job': we wanted to see how you would take it. Do you know that when you said good-bye to your Judas or Baron Slessheim at the corner of the street you were shadowed, and your final words were overheard!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Courier, turning to Mr. Peter Brown. "The friend of the great Tubbs!"

"Not at all," said Mr. Peter Brown cheerfully. "It wasn't me, I'm sorry to say, but the Professor. *Encore un diable savant*, eh?"

"The Professor!"

"That surprises you? You have not gone irredeemably far in your profession of crook, if you are not aware that he—absent-minded and unobservant—would be just the one to light on you."

"But to Mr. Brown belongs the credit," proceeded Mrs. Dane-Vereker, "of——of——"

"Correlating the factors accumulating against you and propounding a provocative course of action," said Mr. Peter Brown, simple in grandiloquence.

"It will be recalled," said Vivian Spencer pleasantly, "that one of those factors was contributed by me. On the strength of the first day and a half of this tour, Turpin—the lavish manner of your housekeeping—the general abandon and profusion of your style of doing things—I failed to perceive, from a fairly extensive experience of

foreign travelling, how you could possibly do it for the money."

There was a crucial, critical pause. They regarded him attentively.

"I know," he murmured, twisting his hands together in his torture—no longer the artist, but the detected business incompetent. "I hoped it would come out all right. . . . I didn't so much want to make a profit out of this first tour as to —to build up good-will. I wanted that you should all be satisfied . . . pleased. I pictured recommendations. . . ."

"My friends!" From Henry Scott's chair the voice of the Psychic Researcher broke silence at last. "That rings true. I don't know quite how you feel about the matter, Brown, nor you, Spencer; but I agree with Mrs. Dane-Vereker in a belief in the original honesty of our courier's intentions towards us, and I am sure that Mrs. Dane-Vereker will vote with me in any motion having the object of saving him—ah—for society. And as I have, after all, been the immediate happy means of his making this disclosure to us,——"

"That's all very well, you know," said Mr. Peter Brown, "but we've paid the fellow for a six weeks' tour."

"But if we have not paid the poor man enough to provide us with a six weeks' tour in our present way of living—and I confess I should not greatly appreciate anything less unstinted—why, then, surely. . . ." It was the Lady of Fashion who thus spoke, faithful to the protective attitude she had happened to adopt.

"'Unstinted,'" murmured the Courier. "Yes: that was my key-note. I wanted the clientèle that innately expected that. . . ." He implied, skilfully enough, that in just those chosen clients before him he had got what he wanted.

"I have the nucleus of a scheme," continued Henry Scott. "You have already paid me tribute as an imaginary romancer. I have the feeling that possibly also, in the realms of real romance . . . Tell me," he demanded of Hector Turpin, "this fellow Slessheim . . . Judas: has he, by any chance, profited by his nefarious practices?"

"Profited!" The Courier spread his hands abroad to indicate the inadequacy of the word. "He is so rich that he is always poor. That is why——"

"Your epigram is expressive." Henry Scott sighed. "One knows the state. Not personally," he explained. "Well . . . so far, excellent."

"Do not mistake me," said the Courier. "He is rich, this Judas, because he is prudent. Every coup he makes, he gives it nearly all to his wife. So they say."

"So who say?" interpolated Henry Scott.

"The gang. I was myself a member. . . ." Thus, a trifle hastily, he anticipated the query, that haply he might obviate thereby a little of the odium.

"D'you think it's really true? Everything depends on that: your own future rather more than ours, you know."

"Scott, what *are* you getting at?" inquired Mr. Peter Brown, intrigued.

"Let him alone, please!" begged Mrs. Dane-

Vereker, lighting a cigarette and leaning back to watch the first puff steal languidly upward in the half-past-one-in-the-morning moonlight. " I feel that he is going to thrill me in a minute. Continue —dear Sir Walter ! "

Scott inclined his head in mock acknowledgment, but waited for Turpin to reply to his last question.

" Undoubtedly it is true. Herodias used to say so—and she, of course, would know. She was so often furious because he did not keep enough for himself—for *her*."

" It seems to place Herodias, anyway," murmured Mr. Peter Brown.

" Oh, undoubtedly he is poor. It is all, Herodias has said, in his wife's name. Some day he will retire and build a villa on the *Côte d'Azur*. Understand me : Judas is a fool, but he is in a very large way of business. It is the fool who makes money in this world," he sighed. " Everyone else sees sometimes something else at least equally worth while. Isn't that so ? "

" I do not regret my presumably opulent bed upstairs," the Lady of Fashion informed the stars.

" This is excellent ! " Henry Scott rubbed his hands in equal satisfaction at Turpin's information and Mrs. Dane-Vereker's interested complaisance. Thereupon—as an Eastern writer might conveniently phrase it—he made the dive of revelation into the waters of amazement, wondering how he was going to come up. . . .

In truth, he came up not so gaspingly as he had expected. Had he been less the Psychic Researcher

than the student of psychology he would have been better aware of the subtle change which his own daring practical joke had wrought in his auditors. Broken ice is not easily repaired. Oozing the mud and bedragglement of intimacy, the party must separate and seek new ponds, if ever they are, with dignity, to skate again. And when intimacy has publicly plastered them, the hitherto dreadfully skirted puddles of audacity, the creaseless trousers of devil-may-care, may be quite lightly regarded.

"But hang it, Scott, consider my official position! . . ." It was the almost despairing cry of the unchaperoned bureaucrat.

"Homer nods," quoth Mr. Peter Brown; "Apollo gets his quiver pinched; the Ethiopian changes his skin. But if I forget thee, O Whitehall, let my red tape forget its cunning! Vulgarly speaking, Vivian, come off it. The beauty of the idea is, to my mind (speaking, you know, at 1.30 in the morning, when, like the ancient Germanic tribe, we make plans in all the freedom of our cups, but leave them subject to matutinal ratification)—the beauty of it is that we can . . . just try it, you know, and see what comes of it. Nothing, probably. If, on the other hand, we all grow rich beyond the dreams of avarice, we can, of course, salve our consciences by giving it all to charity."

"Personally I am considering the alternative, Mr. Spencer," said the Lady of Fashion winsomely. "The alternative seems to me more risky than what Mr. Scott proposes. Evidently, we are closely watched. To deal with Baron

Slessheim in the conventional British way of telling the police really does seem to risk our getting shot or knifed either in the process or by way of revenge afterwards. And undoubtedly it would mean either death or imprisonment for our poor dear courier. . . ."

"Ah, madame . . .!" The Courier deprecated her tenderness for his miserable fate.

"Damn it all . . .!" Vivian Spencer also deprecated it.

"I hope I am not unduly adventurous——" She considered her continuation a moment.

"*Pas aventureuse, encore moins aventurière,*" bowed Henry Scott, in gallant encouragement of his ally.

"Thank you, Mr. Scott. I regard this plan rather as our likeliest means of safety."

"The best defence is to attack," observed Mr. Peter Brown sententiously.

"Exactly. *Sauter, c'est pour mieux reculer,*" quoth the Lady of Fashion.

. . . . . .

By the time two o'clock struck even Vivian Spencer had given his conditional adherence to the undertaking. The condition was that if they got the Poet to agree—extremely unlikely, he thought, considering that it was the Poet who had to thrust his head into the lion's mouth and take what admitted risk there was—he would withdraw his own opposition. Thus, Pilate-like, he washed his bureaucratic hands of their method of dealing with Judas.

"Well, well," said Mrs. Dane-Vereker, rising

with a half-revealed delicate yawn, "to think that we are going to bed in the morning of only the third day of our tour! So much seems, after all, to have happened." She smiled, salvingly, at the Courier.

"So much, probably, is going to happen," said Mr. Peter Brown cheerfully. "I fancy there won't be any ten tales to-day."

"Ah, but you forget," the Courier interposed, softly but feelingly. "Early though it is, we have already had the third day's tales—all of them—from Mr. Scott."

"So we have. And no end of a one from you, my boy, to follow 'em!"

The Bureaucrat had a Parthian shaft. "Venturing to dissent," he said, "from Mrs. Dane's personal impression, I incline to think that, for some little time, at any rate, certain members of our party may demand . . . shall I phrase it? . . . more of the lions of the Continent and less of the gratuitous Lamb's Tales. You may notice that Mr. Buck was proof against the last series." (Thus his sub-acid Civil Service revenge upon Henry Scott.) "He went to sleep. He, at least, will be requiring us to cut the cackle and . . . er . . . come to the fillies."

"Just what my little plan provides for," chuckled Henry Scott. "Good-night, Turpin."

III

Presumably there subsisted between the Courier and the appalling Poet some soul-bond antedating

the history of this Temperamental Tour ; or else it was merely that the Poet's natural vanity was roused at the thought of impersonating a dope-smuggler and general desperado very high up in the profession. That was the capacity in which, accompanied by Turpin, he now confronted " Baron Slessheim " in a small spinney by the roadside, a mile and a half from the château.

Judas scrambled to his feet on seeing them. He looked for a moment dangerous—as though he might suddenly, from any part of his person, spit knives or pistol bullets. But the extreme disreputability of the Poet's appearance reassured him, even before Turpin had had time to do the honours.

" Judas," he said, " I have an explanation to make. But first let me do the honours. Let me present Vers Libre alias Little Snow-White alias the Stoker alias Herbert Hobson."

" Never heard of any of them," growled Judas.

" Permit me to remind you, dear Judas," said Turpin severely, " that I have told you before that you never did move in the best English circles. Vers Libre," he continued, turning to the Poet and speaking with an artfully delicate assumption of deference, " I want to present to you Baron Slessheim alias Judas alias Le Mauvais Bougre. If you had ever touched the general trade of the Continent, I assure you you would not have failed to hear of him."

He spoke as one who was really trying to make the Baron out to be as big as he could in the presence of someone far greater—someone, too,

who was one up in the matter of aliases (magniloquently rolled out, each one of them, like the territorial *de* of a different aristocracy).

" Well, what's he got to do with us, anyway ? " growled Judas again. " ' Vers Libre ' : a queer sort of name. And you don't look English either."

" In the best circles, my dear Judas," interposed Turpin smoothly (happy to have got the opening so early in their proceedings), " it is not, as you very well know, usual to inquire into the genesis of gentlemen's names. Not to know argues yourself unknown, in fact. But, in the circumstances, since Vers Libre has specialised so much in his unrivalled Chinese and American connection, your ignorance is perhaps excusable. He got the name Vers Libre from a notorious disposition he has to cut up rough. (That is, I think, an English idiom which you recognise—with which, indeed, you sympathise ?) "

" Let's get to business," snapped Judas, after a silently hostile stare at the Poet (whose prearranged rôle was one of haughty silence). " What's he putting his nose into it for, anyway ? "

" I regret to say, Judas, that he has vetoed this little business of the Château de la Hourmerie. . . ."

" The devil ! He has vetoed it, has he ? " Judas looked truculently at the Poet, who, beneath his glare, tranquilly produced and lighted another cigarette—hardily consoling his nerves with the anticipation of being able to boast of having done so for the rest of his life.

" Yes. Or rather, he says he doesn't mind your doing it—only not that way. He's really an

awfully good-natured chap, Judas, unless you're going to be such a fool as to irritate him. . . ."

"Doesn't he understand French?" demanded Judas.

"No. At least, I don't think so. If he does, he's never yet given himself away. It's like this, Judas. He let me bring these people over in his yacht. He's mostly—(here the Courier reverently lowered his voice)—mostly in the dope business nowadays. That's how he got the name of Little Snow-White. . . . His own yacht, mind you." Thus he impressed upon Baron Slessheim the wealth and weight of Vers Libre—the inner arcana of crookdom to which he must necessarily belong. Baron Slessheim, who (partly from an ineradicable native tendency to thrift even in the matter of working capital) had never risen to more than a far-from-second-hand Rolls-Royce in his professional operations, was inevitably impressed. The Courier noted this, and surged ahead.

"I didn't know yesterday what his own lay was. Of course, he wouldn't be likely to confide in me; he is a master, I tell you. These people—taking them about in his yacht—feeding them—treating them in the way, mark you, that rich English people like these are accustomed to be treated—to him it is merely a bagatelle. He doesn't even care whether they pay a sou for it all or not."

"*Bagatelles que tout cela!*" said Judas, rudely incredulous from the depth of his envy and trying to reassert himself. "In that case, what *is* his lay?"

"Dope, my friend! Ah, it is indeed an artist, this little Vers Libre! Look at him! Was there ever such a make-up? But bah! you do not know your England, my good Judas. He is dressed as an English poet of the downstairs room of the Café Royal"—this was indeed where the Courier had made his acquaintance—"and when his yacht steams back into an English port with all these magnificently respectable English tourists on board, innocently concealing their little boxes of cigarettes, who is going to suspect them to be the blind for a consignment of I don't know how much of——?" He made the expressive gesture of one who takes snuff, Gallically concluding it by extending from his nose derisive fingers at an imaginary Customs officer. Perhaps it was a prearranged signal. Anyway, with a short, disregardful jerk of his head, the Poet spoke.

"How much longer are you going to talk? I can't wait here. Tell the fellow, if he wants to do anything, to be on board by three o'clock, as arranged."

He spoke contemptuously; and with a curt nod in the direction of Baron Slessheim (though scarcely troubling to look at him), he swung away out of the wood and took the gait of utter nonchalance towards the town. He might or might not, as alleged, never have given away his understanding of French; but as, more certainly, Baron Slessheim had never given away his understanding of English and might understand it very well, the Poet's speech had certainly been rehearsed.

"There you are, then," continued Turpin,

" He is quite willing that you and I should make what little we can—what contents us—out of these people. But he says, and with truth, that if it is not done on his yacht—and where better ?—they will never come back to it. And he cannot have his own arrangements upset. Therefore he says, if you want to go on with the business. . . ."

. . . . . .

The perfectly trained (and presumably venal) servants on board wages at the Château de la Hourmerie were just putting the baggage of the party into the waiting motor cars, when the Courier was called to the telephone.

" Hullo ! Is that Turpin ? " said the voice of the Poet, not without agitation.

" Turpin speaking," responded that worthy, thrilling with emotion towards his auditor. " Oh, my brave Mr. Herrick, but what artistry ! "

" Is it all right ? Has he bitten ? "

" *C'est fin contre fin, et nous faisons bonne pêche,*" Turpin oracularly replied.

IV

When an English yacht, being short-handed, picks up an additional member of its crew in a French port, international courtesy—or even, in particular, the consideration due to an ally—does not demand that the assembled yachting party should receive him in the saloon. Had Baron Slessheim—had Judas, to drop for ever that other ineffectual alias—known enough about the English to be aware of this he might have shown suspicion

and possibly fight on the instant of his being received at the gangway by the Poet and the Courier, and by them escorted down the companion way towards the buzz of conversation below.

But the reception was not to take place. Outside the door of the saloon, on guard, waited Mr. Buck. Preceded by the Poet, Judas had just reached the bottom stair, when he was pinioned from behind. Not without dexterity the Poet, previously coached in his part, plucked away the malefactor's feet; while Mr. Buck stepped forward and promptly administered the necessary chloroform, with the dexterity of one who had often clapped the blanket on a proof press.

To and fro on the deck above, proving their protesting alibis, walked Church and State in the persons of the Priest and the Bureaucrat. . . .

"Neatest thing I ever 'eard of!" whispered Mr. Buck, and chuckled hoarsely, as the beefy form of Judas relaxed. "Not but what I wouldn't 'ave preferred a little set-to with the blighter. I believe I could 'ave settled 'im all right. Ten years ago! . . . Well, there!"

He reflected half-sadly upon the non-existent cocked hat into which he would have knocked Judas ten years ago, while the three of them carried him into one of the cabins, laid him out on the bunk, deprived him of two knives and what the ex-Master-Printer called a duodecimo pea-shooter, and locked him in. Then they made their triumphant entry into the saloon.

"Well?" inquired the Lady of Fashion eagerly.

It was Henry Scott's play that they were performing, remember, and so it was really charming of him to let her make the all-important inquiry. Again, the burden and heat of the day had been borne by the Poet and the Courier; but it was Buck who now, in the intensity of his enjoyment of the business, dominated the officiating deputies. He had been an enthusiast for Scott's idea ever since it had been propounded to the other members of the party; and indeed, but for the moral force which he had brought to bear, the aristocratic group promoting it (with rather more than a waverer in the person of Vivian Spencer) would after all have been overthrown by the more bourgeois consciences of their fellows. But Buck (who needs must love the highest when he saw it) had seized the opportunity of coming to the rescue of Mrs. Dane-Vereker, Mr. Peter Brown, and Henry Scott. And he had really carried the day with the pathetically moral story of the auctioneer who had "let him in."

"Ran no end of a bill with me," he said. "His business looked all right—plenty doing all the time—but he began to run into such a figure that I started to put some inquiries through. Well, *that* seemed all right too: as well as I could hear he paid cash for most of what he had—or rather his wife did. Weekly bills with the butcher and the milkman and so forth: that always looks good, but I don't trust it since then. It all came out when his wife skedaddled and he filed his petition. All in her name, of course. Wonder where they met next. Monte Carlo, I shouldn't wonder.

Anyway, show me the blighter who 'ands his takings over to his missis and I'll show you a danger to the community! I look on it as a sacred moral duty to teach 'im a lesson."

So it was Buck who answered Mrs. Dane-Vereker now.

"*We've* put him to sleep all right," he said. "Couldn't have been done neater by Carpenteer himself."

"I think I'd better go and look at him," said Dr. Pennock, rising.

"Please yourself, ma'am," said Mr. Buck, giving her the key of the cabin. He was a little chagrined that she, who had reluctantly advised him of the correct dose of chloroform, should now interpose to destroy the slight impression of his having done the deed after all with his own strong fist.

"Then the next step is——?"

"Paris," said the Master-Printer briefly. "Ler gay Paree. Only——" he ruminated, "I shouldn't half mind staying on the yacht and acting jailor. Sure you can manage 'im?" he asked Henry Scott.

"Oh, I don't think he'll throw himself overboard, or succeed in capturing the yacht. And when we get to Taranto. . . ."

"That's when you'll send us his missis's address, I hope. You and me," he addressed the Courier, "might run up against some of his pals in Paris, don't you think, while we're collecting his ransom? Any o' them capable of putting up the dooks?"

"They are handier, perhaps, with these," observed the Courier, quietly placing on the table the pistol and the knives taken from Judas.

"Oh, Mr. Turpin!" exclaimed Miss Pogson. "Did he—did he really have . . . things like that on him?"

"Playing with edged tools is a very literal summing up of our proceedings, isn't it?" smiled Mrs. Dane-Vereker.

"Well, I'm sure, I never thought. . . ."

Buck to the rescue of distressed femininity!

"Lord love you," he beamed, "here you've been three days in company with *me*, and you're scared at the sight of a Leith 'All weapon or two! Why, miss——" The happily hazardous turn of events had really made Mr. Buck resilient with zest and dominance, and he was now in full bounce. "Ten years ago, miss, I reckoned I *could* put 'em up a bit, and I wouldn't mind backing myself even now against a few of these here foreign knives and pistols. You're all right with *me*."

"Well, Mr. Buck," said the Lady of Fashion graciously, "if you're going to be so good as to take care of us all—but particularly Mr. Turpin—in Paris, so that—so that our tour may, after all, be carried out to a happy conclusion, we shall be indeed grateful."

"As far as I'm concerned," said Dr. Pennock, re-entering at that moment and speaking with more than her accustomed succinctness, "the position is this. The man Judas—he's quite all right, by the bye—is a fugitive from French

justice. We are not handing him over to the law, but are keeping him here on the yacht, in view of the fact that we are assured that otherwise the dangerous hold he has upon our courier will not only bring the tour to a lamentable conclusion and upset the holiday arrangements of all of us, but may even result in—in violence being done to Mr. Turpin by other members of the gang. That, I take it, is the position—and I think," she added, hearing the small, measured footsteps of Church and State grinding slowly on the deck above, " that I speak for Father Anthony and Mr. Spencer as well as for myself. It is understood that we liberate this . . . felon as soon as we have extracted a promise from him not to harm or interfere with our courier—at least, we make it impossible for him to do so until after the termination of our tour."

Mr. Buck winked delightedly at the Lady of Fashion.

" Ma'am," he said to Dr. Pennock, " you've spoken like a book—and the kind I like too : the kind that's all straight setting and no quotes. No mistake about the cast-off with *you*, ma'am. Anything outside of what you've said, well, that's an extra : that's between old Turps and me, that is. Don't you worry yourself. What you want is this 'ere tour carried through according to programme, as per estimate, and as alleged. Right you are. If it should happen to come out a bit better than that, ma'am, don't you complain, and seek not to inquire. As I was explaining when you came in, you're going to be all right

with *me*. Now *you'll* understand me, being a doctor—though mind you, as a lady doctor, I wouldn't consult you on the subject of anything . . . anything *intimate*—but you'll understand me, when I say that I'm not exactly what I was ten—fifteen—years ago. It's *'ere* that it gets you, ma'am." He prodded his paunch with a crudely demonstrative finger. " I 'aven't the puff nowadays. And they say they're liable to kick you there in these parts, the dirty dogs ! All the same—Masonic dinners and all—I reckon I can still give a good account of myself, if it comes to a dust-up. Ten—fifteen—years ago I could put 'em up with the best. I was known all round our neighbourhood. Why, I'll tell you. I remember once . . . there used to be an annual fair at a market town about ten miles out, and that was always one of my little beanos. It's a wise bird, as the saying is, that fouls somebody else's nest. Well, this pertic'lar time——"

" Pardon me, if I'm forced to interrupt," said Henry Scott, " but I really think it's time that we completed our little arrangements. . . ."

. . . . . .

" That pertic'lar time," said Mr. Buck, resuming in the Paris train by request of Mrs. Dane-Vereker, and addressing also Dr. Pennock, Miss Pogson, and Mr. Peter Brown, " there was a sort of a boxing booth where they were offering a fiver to the chap as was able to stand up for five minutes against a nigger boxer they had there. Well, I paid my money and I went inside to have a look. I didn't reckon much of him by the chaps I saw him

knock out—country yokels mainly. So at last I thought I'd 'ave a go myself, and out I stepped and stripped. Well, I was on my feet all right at the end of the five minutes, and looked more like staying there another five than what the nigger chap did. So I claimed the cash. Well, of course, they tried to get out of it by one excuse or another—said I was a professional and all that.

" ' All right,' I says, ' if I'm not going to have the money, I'll go on fighting.' And with that I set to and give that nigger fair socks, I did—laid 'im out in the inside of another ninety seconds. And then I started in on the manager. But by that time someone had gone for the police, and they came in and collared me and hauled me off to the lock-up. ' Go quiet, Elf,' they says to me, pleading-like, you know. So quiet I went. And they told the super their story, and then, when they'd done, I give him the rights of it. ' Elfred,' says the super to me when I'd done, ' you're a much-injured man, but the fact remains that this fair 'ud be all the quieter without you. If you was to hurry, there's a train home as you could catch. If you *don't* want to catch it, I'm afraid you'll 'ave to spend the night in a cell.' ' Thank you, Mr. Lamb,' I says, ' I'll catch the train.' "

At this point the Courier entered the compartment and announced that dinner was served.

" Ah, Mr. Buck," said the Lady of Fashion, rising to dismiss him, " what you must have been in your unregenerate days ! Our party being now temporarily reduced to eight, we shall have, I fear (with the excitements of Paris ahead of us too)

no fourth day of tales till we are again reunited. I hope you will continue in an attempt to bridge the gap."

"Wait, ma'am," said the gallant Mr. Buck, rolling a deliberately speaking eye upon the dreadfully thrilled Miss Pogson, "wait till the excitements of Paris are *behind* us. *Then* there'll be some tales to tell!"

. . . . . .

The Lady of Fashion no longer wished to segregate the social fleeces, but she contrived for this occasion to make up her table in the restaurant car with Mr. Peter Brown, Vivian Spencer, and Dr. Pennock.

"This tour," she said, "continues to gain in temperamentality by the episode of Judas, in which we are now involved, and by the consequent burgeoning-forth of Mr. Buck—to say nothing of Mr. Herrick and Mr. Scott. It now only requires a love affair." She looked along towards the other table, where, significantly enough, Mr. Buck and Miss Pogson sat elbow to elbow, opposite the Courier and the Priest. "Mr. Buck has taken *us* in hand. Let us take *him* in hand . . . and Miss Pogson. I devote myself to Miss Pogson while we are in Paris."

"Herrick, Scott, and the Professor, no doubt, are meanwhile taking Judas in hand," chaffed Mr. Peter Brown.

"The treatment of character as a branch of pathology has, of course, its professional appeal to me," observed Dr. Pennock with terse sententiousness. "Also, I know my Samuel Butler. But

I must confess that I am apt to find it, like vivisection, rather repellent in practice, however demonstrably correct in theory. The details of vivisection," she continued, hovering the fork of selection above the dish of tired *hors-d'œuvre* presented to her at that moment, " are not a fit subject for discussion at table. Neither, I should have thought, is the experimental union of the poor little school-marm with the prurient, pugilistic Master-Printer. If you devote *her* to be *his* victim, Mrs. Dane-Vereker, I can only hope that the gods, being just, are inspiring Mr. Herrick to mark *you* down for—the man Judas ! "

She stabbed a sardine ; and Mrs. Dane-Vereker too cried, " *Touchée !* "

V

" Let us make the experiment, then," said Henry Scott. . . .

It was a fortnight later, and the tourists were reunited. Paris, Rome, lay behind—for all but the Poet, the Professor, and Henry Scott, who, immersed in their appropriate studies, had remained happily enough on board. The Poet, it has been said, feared his yacht ; but still more (strange to say it of one of his kind !) he feared the Printer ; and, moreover, the part he was now playing would have reconciled him to circumstances the most detestable. He had to maintain before Judas the terrible ascendancy of Vers Libre, who, with fair words to his dupe, Turpin, had kidnapped his continental colleague.

Scott himself had amazing luck, quite unforeseen ; and, since the whole scheme had been his, he deserved it. Judas had proved, to his surprise, no Apache terror : as he vilely jested (but not in the anguished hearing of the Professor), no terror at all to look at, but a much rarer *avis in terra*. The knives and pistol had been indisputable ; and he believed in the genuineness of Turpin's bird-like paralysis before him. But the fellow (or felon) proved to be as presentable as Turpin himself. Set aside a little quite understood ill-humour consequent upon the unauthorised administration of anæsthetic (a curious human trait, reflected Scott, that one has only to confer oblivion upon a fellow being to make him feel that he has been made a fool of)—why, Judas was positively urbane ! His urbanity was that of the shop-walker (and is the latter any less a thief ?). Scott understood the savings invested in the *bourgeoise*. He wore a morning coat and a sprigged waistcoat, brought aboard in a bundle as his chosen change of professional raiment, and he was just a little paunchy. . . .

" One can't help shipboard intimacies," Scott apologised. And indeed, by the time they had reached Taranto, the Psychic Researcher had been for once well swamped in the psychological enthusiast.

" And yet he has not said a word," quoth Herrick, reminiscent of Browning, and referring to the fact that Scott's politest explanations and suggestions in French had failed to persuade him to reveal his wife's address or express any wishes

in the matter of the payment of ransom. The Poet had maintained his rôle largely by a barbarically royal restraint from any direct communication with his prisoner: he would say to Henry Scott, as interpreter, the things that Vers Libre the Terrible would be expected to say, trusting that Judas was meeting his own continued ignorance of French with a like pretence of not knowing English. The unsatisfactory thing about this assumed double bluff was that one could never know whether it was not all waste cleverness. . . . The things he made up to say to Scott began to be tiring, as the thought continued to gnaw: "Perhaps Judas really doesn't understand English."

Hence the experiment now proposed by Henry Scott. They had breakfasted that morning within sight of Ithaca, and the Professor's very gesture as he requested an unwonted third cup of coffee was significant of his own determination henceforth to drink "life to the lees." Towards the drowsy heat of midday, the mud-flats of Missolonghi lay dim to the northward; and the Poet, as he lay—lazily lay—in a deck-chair had bidden Henry Scott discourse to Judas and Turpin (united in continental enthusiasm) about Byron, "dying for freedom far away." As the afternoon advanced, the beauties of the Gulf of Corinth had failed, gradually, to compete with the sleepiness of the party. But at tea-time they came beneath the loom of Parnassus. In the gold of late afternoon they rounded into the little bay of Itea and dropped anchor. Voting it too late to go on

shore that day, yet a little restless with the re-invigorating effects of slumber and tea, they sat watching the gold haze upon the lovely heights turn slowly to rose, while cloudier purple began its upward climb.

It was then that Scott made his suggestion, and (even the Bureaucrat being made a little holy and human by the beauty of the scene) none forbade him.

"Surely—at some point or other—through what may be of comic, tragic, amatory, pitiful, or adventurous—he must, if he knows the language, betray himself?" he argued, and therewith bade the diffident, aloofly hulking Judas draw near and take a chair amid his warders and betters. It was amusingly, eminently human that he should cling for company to the neighbourhood of Turpin, and should very much embarrass poor Turpin by so doing.

"Ducdame," said Henry Scott. . . .

"Meaning that it is fools whom you've called into a circle?" inquired the Lady of Fashion. "*Merci!* But"—with a glance at Judas—"perhaps we are."

"In that case," Scott hastened to explain, "myself the first and not least, you know."

"But honoured of us all," Mr. Peter Brown kindly assured him, with a mind that ran still on Ithaca and Ulysses.

"And in *that* case," Scott repeated, "you fling on me, I suppose, the burden of beginning! I regard it as cheap payment for so undeserved an assurance. For, you know, I flatter myself that

I—that all of us are beginning to find a facility in this kind of thing. So much so that I personally am going to give you this time what is mainly a narrative within a narrative—just as though you were hearing it as I first heard it, and as if I had written it down in stereotyped story form. I hope I am not trying to be too daring. Anyway, here is

THE FOURTH DAY'S TALE OF THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER"

THE PSYCHIC
RESEARCHER'S TALE

THE BUCKROSS RING

By L. A. G. STRONG

I WONDER how many people to-day recall the finding of the Buckross treasure and the excitement it caused. A very few probably: yet, in those far-off days it was a newspaper sensation of the first magnitude, and the diagrams of Crippen's progress across the Atlantic were scarcely followed with more care than the daily record of the search, and the progress made in excavating the hoard which had escaped King Hal's Commissioners.

It was known that the original clue to the hiding-place lay in a signet ring which had belonged to the last abbot, and the papers published greatly enlarged photographs of this ring, with crosses to mark the tiny secret catch by which it opened. Facsimiles of the folded parchment inside it were published also, with translations, and the portrait of Giddas, who deciphered it, most liberally inset. Banks and I also came in for more than our fair share of publicity. In fact, the public was given every detail of the discovery save one, into which

by happy chance it forbore to inquire—namely, the manner in which the ring itself was found.

I say, "by happy chance," because Banks, Giddas, and myself had decided in any case not to reveal this. As long as a man of science deals in the ascertainable, the public venerate him. Let him once espouse the unknown, the occult, the unknowable—and he is dubbed a madman and a crank, outcast or ridiculed by his fellows: and, what is far worse, any subsequent truth he may discover, in no matter what field of research, is contaminated and suspect because of his name. Therefore, as none of us desired this fate, we rejoiced in the public lack of curiosity on this, the most important point in the story; and remained silent.

To-day, however, things are different. Banks is dead, killed, poor fellow, on a mine-sweeper in the North Sea. Giddas has retired, and lives altogether in Italy now: I have not heard from him for a long time. For myself, I have reached an age when I no longer greatly care if men accept my story or deride it: and they are less likely to deride it now, when the systematic study of the occult is a recognised branch of science, and no longer reckoned as a premonitory symptom of lunacy.

It seems good to me, therefore, to set down the story of how the ring was found, before all interest in the treasure is completely lost and Buckross itself less than a memory.

. . . . . .

One day, then, early in May, in the year nineteen-

hundred-and-nine, having come up on business to the city, I made my way into Gatti's for lunch. I spied a table at some distance, and was making my way to it, when a man turned suddenly, jumped up, and clapped me on the shoulder.

"Scott!" he cried, "by all that's odd! What brings you here? We've just been talking of you."

"Banks, my dear man. Why, I thought you were still in Mexico! And Giddas! How are you, my dear Professor? Well, well, this is indeed a fortunate meeting."

"Come over to our table. It is in a corner, and we can talk."

As soon as the first greetings and questions were over—for I had not seen my old friends for the better part of four years—Banks leaned over the table towards me and dropped his voice.

"Look here, Scott. We have a job on hand that will interest you. You remember that summer we spent together at Abingdon?"

"Very well."

"Do you remember the story we heard there—the old tale of the Buckross treasure?"

"How the last abbot was supposed to have buried the treasure to save it from the King's officers, and no one could tell where it had been hidden?"

"That is right. Well—we kept that in mind, Giddas and I; and we have lost no chance, at odd times, of hunting up any information we could find about the old Abbey and the Manor House

adjoining it. Giddas dug up something in the Bodleian a good while back: but it was not until I chanced on an even more valuable find, in a little Oxfordshire church, in the cupboard where the old registers were kept, that I became really interested. And now "—he looked quickly from left to right—" I'm hot on the track."

" No? Tell me."

Banks leaned back as the waiter flourished the dishes past our heads, and looked at me with a twinkle in his brown eyes. He was dark and bold, though by far the youngest of the three. Giddas all the while rolled little pellets of bread in his fingers, and looked, birdlike, from one to the other of us.

As soon as the waiter had gone, Banks leaned forward again.

" I have found," he said, " the journal of one of the monks, Gilbert by name: also a kind of diary written at intervals by a lady who lived at the Manor. The former took ages to read through, for it was written very small in a big book, and contained little enough relevant to our search. The other, which was of more importance, was even more troublesome to read, but Giddas here unravelled it."

Giddas snorted.

" Yes," he said, " and never have I had to decipher such a document. Only Banks's insistence could have made me persevere with it. A pathologist, perhaps—a student of the morbid——"

" Hush, don't spoil the story. Anyway, Scott, by putting together what the two writings

had to tell us, I believe we're on the track of the treasure."

Banks spoke quietly, but with a trace of strong excitement. Knowing he would not say thus much without good reason, I became at once deeply interested.

"Tell me all about it," I begged him.

"A tall order," said Giddas, attacking a new potato with gusto. "A tall order. Difficult to know where to begin."

"Perhaps it will be better if I reconstruct the whole story, to the best of my ability, combining what both documents say: and you, friend Giddas, shall correct me if I go wrong."

Then Banks pushed away his plate and began.

. . . . . .

"I don't exactly know how it was that the Abbey and Manor first became connected; it seems fairly certain that the Abbey was the older of the two. Still, as often in mediæval times, they were inter-related. Whether it was a question of owning adjacent lands, or for purely defensive purposes, we can't be sure: but somehow or other the Abbot had come to be regarded as a kind of Chaplain to the Lord of the Manor. Giddas tells me it is very unlikely that an Abbot would stand in such capacity to a layman: yet the fact remains that monks from the Abbey used to do secretarial and other work at the Manor, and the Manor folk used to attend services at the Abbey. There were, I believe, monastic orders who discharged secular duties as a means of discipline, or for additional livelihood—is it not so,

Giddas ?—and that seems to have been the case here. Gilbert, for instance, the monk whose journal has been so valuable to us, acted as librarian, and kept the roll for the Manor : another monk acted as physician, and so forth. Indeed, there seems to have been the greatest freedom of intercourse between the communities. The ladies of the Manor would wander at pleasure in the Abbey gardens, save in such parts of them as were reserved for meditation : and the Lady Garda—our diarist—herself records how, when she was a child, the Abbot would take her to help him catch fish from the old stone fishpond. He was her confessor also, and later on she gave the good man some offence by wishing that another, and younger, ecclesiastic should act in that capacity instead."

"Very probably," snapped Giddas, with whom the enforced perusal of the lady's diary seemed to rankle.

"Well," continued Banks, "of all the community represented by the Abbey, the Manor, and the village that had grown up around them, we need concern ourselves with only three or four persons. The first of these is the lady, Garda Brent, or as she was simply called, the Lady Garda, who was the author of the diary I mentioned.

"The Lady Garda was the eldest daughter of the house, and she was still a girl when her father died, leaving as his heir a boy of nine. As was only natural, the estates were taken in charge by the Abbey, and administered until the boy should

come of age. Possibly it was through some such occurrence in the past that the close association between the Abbey and the Manor first began.

"At the time our story opens the Lady Garda was a woman of thirty-one, and still unmarried. It is difficult to say why she was so: Gilbert records that she had fair hair, a clear skin, and was pleasant to look on. Maybe the old Abbot's tutelage was not conducive to matrimony, though I cannot think he would have discouraged her from it. Her mother was an invalid, and could do little for her. Perhaps she did not often meet with men of her own class, or perhaps she was one of those good-looking girls who are nevertheless deficient somehow in sex attractiveness. At any rate, the fact is that at thirty-one she was single, and looked like remaining so.

"Well, thirty-one is an unsettled time in a single woman's life, and the Lady Garda appears to have been one of those women to whom marriage is a necessity. Nature, thwarted, took her revenge, and the Lady Garda fell madly in love with a handsome page-boy of fourteen.

"We may read a great deal nowadays about the savage unsatisfied jealous love of an older woman for a boy, but the Lady Garda's diary is a document more convincing than anything I have read. All the pent-up fires in her nature, all the idealism and the morbidity of a passionate imagination, were focussed upon an immature boy, little better than a child. Giddas may sniff as he will, but I find a beauty and a pathos, a dignity even, in that diary, and so will you, I

think, Scott, when you read it. Strong emotion of any kind should never fail to move us, however unhappy its source or morbid its expression : and there is no doubting the strength of Garda's passion for the page-boy Gaston.

" He, for his part, seems to have begun by reverencing her as a goddess. She was fair and moved above him. She was kind, and this won his devotion. For a long time he adored her thus : and when at last he realised that she loved him, he seems to have been equally balanced between terror and worship. One day he kissed her hand.

" Then, poor girl, she made a mistake. She ought to have left him that miracle to ponder on for a while. Instead—she was so transported, I suppose—instead, she caught him up and kissed him passionately on the mouth. He broke from her with a cry, ran away, and she did not see him for a week.

" After that things went more smoothly. He aged rapidly—Lord, how the first knowledge of love ages a boy—and he came back to her. He grew physically, and she, I'm afraid, left nothing undone to centre his love upon her, body and soul. Gaston changed, not altogether for the better. He grew exacting, claiming unconsciously the mastery of sex which she had usurped in declaring her love to him. With a boy's insensitiveness he often hurt her. She could never be sure of him. She had continually to be on the alert, desperately using every device to keep the love that was to her everything upon earth.

" But Gaston was a good lad at heart, and on

the whole he was kind to her. Where he failed, it was through youth and want of imagination. He seems, as he grew a little older, to have alternated between periods of feverish devotion and fits of reticence, shyness, and remorse. After all, such a love-affair was a pretty serious addition to the ordinary complications of adolescence. On the whole, he did well by his lady : and he had no easy time of it, for you may be sure the Abbot soon tumbled to the case, and secret meetings are pretty demoralising for even the best.

" Now let's leave them for a moment, and come to the other important person in the story—Bibi."

Banks paused and took a drink.

" Bibi ? " I said ; " what a strange name. Who was Bibi ? "

" Bibi—well, Gilbert called him ' Monstrum ' ; yet he was only a child. He was presumably six years old when he was found near the Abbey, a child with a small, shrunken body, rickety limbs, and a huge head, in which were set little uncanny features and big staring eyes. Some people travelling through the village had abandoned him there. They had stayed a night at the inn, where Bibi had been an object of much terrified curiosity to the village folk, and had left with him the next day. They professed to be his parents, ' though,' says Gilbert, ' how so huge a head can have come through the gate of any woman's body, I cannot tell.' However, as his head grew greatly during the eighteen months he was at the Abbey, perhaps it was little above normal size when he was born.

Anyhow, for some reason these people abandoned him; and three days later the villagers found him and brought him to the Abbey. He was starving, and his little beaky mouth was green and foul with grass, like a horse's bit.

"The monks took him in, dubiously enough, and fed him with milk. In a few days he recovered, and as there was nowhere else to send him and he was obviously very delicate, they decided in the end to keep him. He was intelligent enough, but spoke little: Bibi was his name, he said, and Bibi they called him.

"It is difficult from the records left of him to say definitely how far his intelligence went. At all events it seems to have been of an unearthly order. He walked slowly, putting one of his weak little feet before the other with care, swaying often beneath the weight of his enormous head, and balancing himself with his hands. His features were of normal size, although old-looking and queer. His eyes, as I have said, were big and staring, and he blinked very seldom, and then rapidly, three or four times. His lips came out almost to a point, and there was a distinct fissure in the lower lip. It was from the forehead upwards that the abnormal growth began, the head suddenly swelling out on either side like a puff-ball, and having scarcely any hair upon it. His skin was almost brown, of a rather parchment-like texture, smooth on the head, but wrinkled a little on the cheeks and on most of the body. He was pot-bellied also.

"As I said, he spoke little, but his few remarks

denoted preternatural intelligence. The monks soon gave up all attempts to instruct him, for he would not attend to them, and if compelled to do so, would suffer, or feign to suffer, headache. So they contented themselves with baptising him, and let him roam about as he pleased, and it is not recorded that he was either mischievous or troublesome.

"Loud noises he hated; they hurt his head. For that reason he could not bear to be in the chapel, but would sit outside upon the lawn in summer time, out of the sun, and listen contentedly enough. Once, when a big dog, released from a kennel, barked suddenly near him, he fell in a kind of fit, and was carried away, his face contorted with pain, pressing his hands to his temples and uttering thin little hooting cries.

"After a time the people lost their fear of him, and many treated him with kindness, notably the Lady Garda, for whom alone he showed anything like affection. She would chatter gaily to him, and deck him in all her beads, putting necklace after necklace round his tiny neck. She had to be very careful in putting them on, not to touch his head. Gaston, helping her one day, with rather a bad grace, for he was afraid of Bibi, accidentally touched the enormous head with the beads; and it took Garda a long time to console and soothe the child, who distrusted Gaston thereafter.

"In return for her kindness, Bibi would follow her about, waddling carefully after her, and by a strange instinct never losing the trail, however soon she passed from his sight. More than once,

while she was with Gaston among the mazy yew hedges and walks, the huge head appeared round a corner a couple of feet from the ground, and gave her a curious shock. Yet she never heeded him, knowing intuitively that he would never attempt to tell what he saw; and so the unblinking eyes of Bibi would stare solemnly upon their endearments.

"There was an even more curious side of him however. Cats feared and yet were fascinated by him. Several times a crash was heard in the room where he slept, and a monk, rushing to the place, would find an oaken chair or some such heavy object overturned, and Bibi peacefully asleep. Most curious of all—I should be inclined to think it a yarn, if it weren't that Gilbert shows no trace in his journal of imaginative gifts—was a performance he went through almost every afternoon. He would disappear into the ante-chapel, and sit down in a rather damp corner farthest from the door. Gilbert, following one day to see where he had gone, found him there, and fearing the cold stones would chill him, tried to persuade him to come back into the sunlight. Bibi refused, and Gilbert went away. As it chanced, he met the Abbot outside and told him of his anxiety; so together they crept in to see what the child was at. He was still sitting there, in exactly the same attitude, making neither sound nor gesture, watching intently a hole in the wall. Presently, to their amazement and horror, there crept from the hole a huge pale toad, which came out a little way and sat before Bibi. For a time

they gazed at each other, toad and child; then at last Bibi rose and toddled out, and the toad crept back to its hole.

"This, says Gilbert, happened often. What do you think?—a yarn, eh? Well, it doesn't matter much, either way.

"But not long after this something far more startling occurred. It was towards the close of a spring day, when the long light was beginning to fail and the rooks were going noisily to bed. Bibi had been restless all day, never remaining still, and moving about more quickly than usual. He seemed uneasy in his mind also, and to dislike being left alone, for he kept near whatever monk he could attach himself to, and even stayed for a while close to Gaston, whom he hated. As it grew dusk he became more and more restless, and was finally seen waddling off in the failing light towards the refectory; but since he was often in there, watching the birds fly in at the windows to pick up crumbs, no one thought anything more of it.

"Suddenly there broke upon the air the most terrible pandemonium, as if in the refectory all hell had been let loose. The monks rushed to the spot, but the great doors were shut and barred. It sounded to the terrified men as if a regiment of fiends were within, flinging the heavy oak benches and tables about, and dashing the ringing flagons on the floor. The doors, the whole building, shook with the concussion. White-faced monks ran for the Abbot, but before bell, book, and candle could be fetched the clamour ceased. The doors

were burst open, and, crowding in, they found all the tables and benches piled grotesquely into heaps, and Bibi lying senseless upon the floor."

"A medium," I murmured. "Poltergeist—a low-grade medium. I know of several such cases."

Banks nodded to me. "Precisely," he said. "I think what astounded the monks more than anything else was that, after all the violence and noise they had heard, none of the furniture had so much as a scratch to show for it."

"What about Bibi?" I asked.

"At first they thought he was dead; but he still breathed, so they put him to bed and held a consultation. The Abbot wanted to hold a service of exorcism at once, but the monk who served as physician was of opinion that Bibi would die if any further strain were put upon him, and that perhaps the evil spirits had gone out as it was, banging the refectory furniture about in place of rending Bibi. So they put it off for the time."

"I must tell you, Banks," interjected Giddas, "that I am extremely sceptical on the subject of these—er—manifestations."

"I know you are," replied Banks tolerantly. "I know you are, my dear Giddas. Yet I think Scott here can assure you that, even in our prosaic age, such things can, and do, occur. However, let us get on with the story.

"Late the next day Bibi recovered consciousness, but he was seized with a violent headache and could not lift his head. He remained like this for three days, refusing all nourishment, except a little milk which the Lady Garda somehow persuaded

him to take. On the fourth day the Abbot decided to hold the service of exorcism, since he considered that some at least of the evil spirits remained, and were the cause of Bibi's suffering. So they trooped into the chamber, and there, with bell, book, and candle, the devil was solemnly adjured to leave vexing of Bibi Bighead, and come out of him.

"Those who expected terrible convulsions to rack the child did not see their fears realised, for he slept peacefully through the ceremony. It must have been a strange scene—the candles, the robes, the chanted Latin, and the apprehensive eyes fixed upon that monstrous little figure in the bed.

"Maybe the Abbot was right, and the evil spirits did leave Bibi; for although his pain did not go at once, he recovered and was soon about again. But he was shakier than before, and his head began noticeably to grow bigger and bigger. It was as though the skull was thin, almost like elastic, and the fluid—I suppose it was fluid—inside kept distending it more and more. Bibi grew peevish and walked less; his head was becoming too heavy for his wizened neck; and Gilbert has noted in his journal how one day, when Bibi sat in a chair in the great hall, watching a monk at work upon a tapestry, a ray of light coming through one of the windows, showed pink through the almost transparent skull.

"It must have been soon after this that the Abbot began to hear disquieting rumours about the King's activities: and one autumn day he

received a message from a brother Abbot of Buckland in Devon, which made up his mind for him. It would appear that the King's Commissioners —did you know this, Giddas?—began their search as far away from London as might be, and worked back towards it. I suppose they thought the most-distant monasteries the richest, or else imagined that the abbots of far-off places, on being plundered, would conclude that the nearer monasteries had suffered the same fate already, and so would not trouble to give them warning. If so, they were mistaken for once, for his reverence of Buckland sent warning. There was a consultation; and for several days afterwards lanterns were to be seen crossing the fields by the Abbey at night, and maybe the September gales did not altogether drown the occasional clink of spade and mattock.

"The good Abbot did not hide all his treasure. That would have been foolish. Suffice to say that when His Majesty's Commissioners arrived they found the Abbey a deal less rich than they had been led to suppose. I dare say they had their suspicions, but the minutest search revealed no trace of anything more. I am going beyond my story, however; the Commission did not arrive for many months after it was expected.

"As the winter drew on, Bibi rapidly became worse. The last time he sat in the great hall, in his high chair, he turned suddenly a pale yellow colour, and his now enormous head rolled to one side. He could no longer support it. Indeed, they thought the weight of it would break his neck,

it drooped so hideously, until they undid the strap and got him out of the chair. He was hurried to bed, and it soon became evident that Bibi Bighead had only a few days to live.

"Moved by some impulse—I cannot believe that she felt any real affection for him—the Lady Garda constituted herself his nurse. I think she took a delight in her fearlessness of this little monster from whom all other women shrank, and was conscious too, perhaps, of a curious bond of intimacy between Bibi and herself. Certainly he would do what she bid him, and at her approach and touch the little whimperings would soon cease. She never seemed to show him any real tenderness, but rallied and mocked him gently, as she had always done when he was up and well. Still the creature seemed perfectly to understand and be content.

"At last he died. Garda herself barely mentions his death. 'Bibi is passed this night with great anguish to God' is her only comment. But Gilbert has left a vivid account of the scene, which made a strong impression on him.

"Many of the monks were present, in a wide semi-circle about the bed, while Garda herself sat beside it. The only other women present ventured no farther than the doorway. From time to time the murmur of a prayer was heard.

"Bibi lay upon the bed, his body wriggling, his head perforce still. The horrible thing was that the obvious agony of the child excited not sympathy, but repulsion, among the beholders. The good Gilbert takes himself severely to task

for this. 'I,' he says, 'who am tender to the worm cut by my unwitting spade, yet had not love enough to pity the torment of this child of God.' But there it was: they could not pity him, they only felt sick.

"From time to time Bibi would press his little hands to his temples and utter a little thin scream—'Ee—ee—ee—eee. Ee—ee—ee—eee.' Just like that. No human emotion in it; just a detached, unearthly, suffering sound.

"A candle suddenly flared up and went out, frightening them all, for they were on the jump, not knowing what devilment to expect. Yet Bibi's death was unaccompanied by any manifestation. He suddenly screamed and tried to sit up; but the weight of his head held him down, and he died at once. For a time they waited, expecting at any moment to hear the furniture being dashed about, or the very roof taken over their heads; but nothing untoward happened, so by twos and threes they went off to bed. The Lady Garda laid out the body with her own hands, and then went back to the Manor. To do her justice she had watched over Bibi almost unremittingly, and was always at hand when he grew fractious or was in especial pain.

"Now we come to the most complicated and difficult part of the story, where we have to piece it out with but little to go on. You must remember, Scott, that I am all the time at a disadvantage. I am not relating a story prepared for my understanding, with the topography and all incidental matters explained. Instead I have to reconstruct

the whole from a few hasty notes made to refresh the writers' own memories. Even Gilbert takes for granted a knowledge of the Abbey grounds, the country round about, the persons and characters of the monks, et cetera. So if I seem vague at times, you must forgive me.

"Well, it seems that the Abbot had taken Gaston under his wing, and the boy spent much time in the Abbey, and often waited upon the Abbot in person. Whether it was that the boy had taken his fancy, or that he wanted to keep him out of the Lady Garda's way, we cannot be sure; probably the latter. But whatever the reason, it did not prevent Gaston and the Lady Garda from having a tiff soon before Bibi died. Gaston was older now, and I dare say harder to manage. Perhaps he was jealous of her nursing Bibi. Anyway, they had a row, and after a period of distraction for both of them, they met again and were reconciled.

"As I said, Gaston was older. What exactly took place we can only guess, but at any rate Gaston had a fit of scruple after it, and decided that they must be betrothed. The lady hastily explained that this was impossible, but he was firm, and insisted that they should at any rate plight their troth privately to one another. The only drawback was, that he had no means of getting a ring."

"Aha!" said I. "I see where we're coming to now."

Banks held up a hand. "Not too fast," he smiled, "we're not there yet. Here—waiter.

Coffee, please—black? — black? — three black, waiter, and the bill."

He leaned forward over the table once more.

"Well, Bibi was dead, and nothing happened, so after a while they took courage, and the physician and the village apothecary embalmed him between them. 'Twas a pity, they said, not to preserve such a creature for the admiration of posterity."

Giddas fidgeted in his chair.

"Oh, I know they didn't put it like that—I'm not quoting. You must allow me a story-teller's licence, Giddas, to—to—modernise the text. Anyhow, embalming didn't seem to suit Bibi. They had put him, for the time, in the little coffin that was made for him first of all, to let him dry, I suppose. This coffin—it was almost heart-shaped, because of his head—lay on a table in a disused room at the Abbey, where furniture was kept, and hunting gear, and the like. Well, that night there were noises, and the coffin levitated——"

"The coffin what?"

"Levitated. Rose in the air and floated about. Several of them saw it and they were scared out of their wits, and shut the door. When they fetched the Abbot and opened the door again, the coffin was back on the table: and the Abbot was inclined to disbelieve them. The next night, however, it happened again; so they took bell, book, and candle, and obediently enough the spirit put Bibi down again. They were much heartened by this exhibition of the power of holiness, and retired to sleep with a good conscience.

" The next evening the Abbot sat peacefully in his chamber after supper, before a fine fire. Gaston came in quietly, and asked him if there were anything he wanted.

" ' No, my son,' replied the old man ; and then, a thought striking him, he called back Gaston, and asked him for his oaken box.

" This was a little box kept beside his bed. When Gaston had brought it him, and retired, the Abbot fumbled for a key that hung from his girdle, opened the box, and took from it a big bunch of keys. Crossing to one of the stone posts by the fireplace, he passed his hand over it. It swung towards him easily, on a hinge, and revealed a strong cupboard, sunk in the stonework of the chimney. A safe, my friends, a mediæval safe !

" From this he took a little leather wallet, swung back the chimney-post, and crossed to the light. Within the wallet lay a large signet ring, apparently of a deep-red tarnished gold. He sat down at his writing-table, took a knife from his girdle, whittled a quill to a very delicate point—he was long satisfying himself as to the point—and bent over his work.

" Now we know, my dear Giddas " (for the professor had again exhibited signs of impatience during the narration of these details), " that the clue to the treasure's whereabouts was contained in the ring. It cannot have been marked on the metal, or the Abbot would not have needed a quill pen. No : the clue must have been written on a piece of parchment, and that parchment hidden

somehow in the ring. Accordingly, I conjecture that the ring must have been unusually large.

"Well, unless I'm entirely upon a false scent, the Abbot must have finished his task, the addition, I suppose, of some minute detail to the parchment, written very small with his fine pen-point, and must have actually replaced the parchment in the ring, when all of a sudden there broke out the most appalling din. A wave of hideous panic terror shivered through the air; the ink-horn was flung down, a goblet fell from the table with a crash, and from below stairs came a pandemonium as of devils let loose. The Abbot didn't stop to think—he ran.

"For minutes on end it seemed as if the building was beleaguered by the infernal powers. A long oak table in the great hall rose on one leg, swayed, curvetted, and hopped sideways, before the eyes of the horrified beholders. A brass bowl of immense size, hanging by a handle from the wall, was unhooked, held in the air for a second or so, and then dropped with an ear-splitting clang. And everywhere was fear, sheer, hair-raising, panic fear.

"How long this lasted no one knows; but suddenly the Abbot's voice was heard on the stair. Strained and clear, it rang out over the tumult:

"'My children, my children!' he called. 'Cast out fear. Cast out fear.'

"What happened then Gilbert cannot tell us, for he lost consciousness for a brief space, but calm was soon restored and the disturbance

ceased. What was more, in that sudden access of courage which the Abbot's words inspired, everyone seems to have felt that the evil was rebuked and overcome, at least for the time.

" They were just breathing thanksgivings for their deliverance, when a sudden remembrance chilled the Abbot. He stopped short in what he was saying, turned and almost ran upstairs.

" It was as he feared. The ring was gone.

" He kept his head, though, did the old Abbot. Very few, of course, knew the real importance of the ring. So in the morning he gave out that his signet ring had gone, and bade a search be made. Folk the more readily joined therein as several objects of value were easily found in places whither the impish power of the night before had flung them. All—save perhaps the Abbot—were convinced that Bibi's devils were the thieves.

" As a matter of fact, Gaston on that same night had given the ring to the Lady Garda.

" If she did not at once realise whose it was, she was not long in doubt, for the loss was speedily made known. She contrived to meet with Gaston among the yews behind the fish-pond, and there scolded him in whispers. Imperiously he put his hand upon her mouth and bade her now declare, was he not indeed a man ? And, be damned to it, but he was. It must have taken a deal of cold, determined courage to have gone through all that hell's delight to grab the ring. He had crept back and watched the Abbot through the hangings.

" Indeed, some thought of Gaston came into the Abbot's mind, and he sent for and questioned

him ; but the boy's story was so natural—how he had run out into the garden in fear of all the clamour—that the old man was satisfied. All the same, he was taking no chances, and night-time vigils were kept near the treasure's hiding-place, so Gilbert tells us, till the advent of the King's men.

" Meantime, however, the search was pursued pretty rigorously, and on the day following a monk came to pray the Lady Garda that she and her wenches would turn out their belongings, in case the powers of evil should have spirited the ring among them. Garda smiled her assent—she had the ring in her bosom—and bade her chamber-woman conduct the monk above stairs and make the search. Somewhat embarrassed, the good man suffered himself to be led off.

" But the Abbot had not done yet. At the conclusion of a day's fruitless hunting, during which every other missing object was found, except one of the handles of a two-handled silver cup, he announced that a solemn service of commination would be held that night to curse the person of the thief, be he human or diabolical. Reminds one of the Jackdaw of Rheims, doesn't it ?

" Well, this was more than Garda bargained for. Gaston was shaken too, but not greatly ; he had observed that the previous services had taken very little effect upon the evil spirits. Still, he was uneasy, he said, on her account. She reassured him.

" That night, before the service was due to

begin, she crept to the room where Bibi lay. Everyone else shunned it like the plague, especially after dark. She herself confesses to more than one qualm of terror. For a few seconds she stood in the doorway, shading her rushlight in her hand from the draught, hearing no sound but the loud beating of her own heart. The flame burnt up again, and she looked at the coffin, half fearing to see it up somewhere in the air; but there it was in its place upon the table.

"Then, catching her breath, she fumbled in her bosom for the ring, crossed over to the coffin and stood the rushlight on the table beside it. Shaken with a nameless repulsion, she forced open Bibi's mouth, rammed the ring hard back into the gullet, and shut the mouth again. She took one quick look to see that the lips were composed as before, then ran off quickly to her room. Then she washed her hands in seven changes of running water, murmuring Paternosters and making the sign of the Cross.

"Well, to cut a long story short, no one was the worse for the commination—not even Gaston. The Lady Garda did not tell him of what she had done. As for the ring, the monks reasoned that a devil who could lift an oaken table several feet could in the nature of things move a mere ring a dozen miles; and so the loss was soon forgotten—except by the Abbot, and those in the know, that is."

"But what became of Bibi?" I asked.

Banks smiled, rather enigmatically.

"Oh, they were not taking any more risks with

him. They packed him out of the way soon enough."

I pressed him for more details, but he only smiled and sat back in his seat. "Well, Professor," he said, turning to Giddas, "have I not made good use of the material?"

"You have indeed," answered the Professor. "Almost too good in places. I confess I cannot recall some of the details you have mentioned. Yet I own I am amazed at the skill with which you have collated the different accounts into one coherent story."

"Good," replied Banks. "I felt I had to get it all clear in my mind, before I could be sure where we stood. And that's about as far as we can get. The Lady Garda, after this, seems to have thought the keeping of a journal too risky a business. We hear from Gilbert that not long after the break-up of the monastery, she married a man considerably older than herself, and went to live in an adjoining county. As for the monks, they were scattered far and wide; and the old Abbot did not long survive the dissolution."

"So you think then that the treasure remains where they hid it?" I asked doubtfully.

Banks lifted his shoulders. "We know the king's men didn't get it," he said. "The Abbot died, and you may be sure that the few who were in the secret did not make any attempt to regain it for a considerable period, if at all. The times were too troubled. Besides, what could they have done with it? The Abbey was no more. Unless they smuggled it abroad somehow—which is

unlikely, since, even if the digging up were safely accomplished, the conveyance of such a bulky collection must have attracted notice—the only thing they could have done would be to make a gift of it to another branch of their order. Giddas, who has been so good as to investigate for me, can find no evidence of such a gift in any of the available records."

"But—surely," I interposed, "it would be hard to be certain of them all? Would not the gift, in the very nature of things, be made secretly?"

"It is, of course, possible," replied Banks. "All the same, I am prepared to bet that the treasure is still where it was left, that the knowledge of it died with those few monks, and that the clue to the hiding-place is where the Lady Garda put it—in Bibi's mouth."

"Then," I said jestingly, "all you have to do is to find Bibi, and the thing is done."

Banks paused for a moment, and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"I have found Bibi," he said, carefully inspecting one of his finger-nails.

"What—you have found him! Where is he?"

"In my studio at Kensington."

I stared at him in amazement.

"Giddas and I were going to open him this afternoon," he continued, "and then luckily we ran into you: so you will be able to come and help us."

"I was not aware," put in Giddas, in his precise voice, "that Banks had unearthed the

creature. The first intimation I had was a telegram from him this morning, asking me to meet him here for lunch."

"I brought the coffin up last night by train," said Banks; "left it in the studio, and slept at my club."

"What, you've had him all this time, and not yet opened him to see if the ring is there?"

He smiled wryly.

"Well, Scott, I'm not an unduly superstitious man, I hope, but there are one or two little facts about Bibi—as you've heard—which made me feel I'd like company for the job of opening him. Come, let us be going."

"He—he—he!" cackled Giddas suddenly, as we fetched our hats and sticks. "So you slept at the club. He—he—he!"

A few moments later we were in a taxi, speeding westward. There was a feeling in the air of invincible spring. The folk in Piccadilly seemed light of foot and happy, and the Green Park was freshness itself. The gentle air seemed to rebuke our well-fed complacency, and the fantastic business on which we were bound became more and more incredible.

"But tell me, Banks," I jerked out, as well as the jolting vehicle would let me, "how did you find Bibi? You told me they had got rid of him. Where was he?"

"In the vault," he replied. "I flatter myself I read their minds to a nicety. They wouldn't cast him away altogether—he was a human being after all, and had been duly baptised into the

Church. At the same time they wanted to bottle him up safely."

"Well?"

"So I explored the vault to see if there was any sign of a chamber, or a hollow, or a corner that had been bricked up. And, sure enough, I found one, with the stones going the opposite way to the wall stones, and smaller. They'd bricked him in."

"And now he is in your rooms?"

"Yes. I only hope he hasn't kicked up Jacks' alive during the night."

We became silent for a while: indeed, conversation was difficult in this vehicle, to which my old-fashioned tastes still vastly preferred a hansom. Alas, a hansom is a rarity now. I saw one plying in the Strand the other day, and people turned to stare after it.

Still, there can be no denying that the taxi has the advantage if one is in a hurry. Very soon we had passed down Kensington High Street, and a couple of minutes later the cab was paid and we were ascending the wide stairs to Banks's quarters. The latchkey did its work, and almost on tiptoe we crossed the outer room, Banks leading.

"It's all right," he said in a voice of relief. "Nothing has happened. I was half expecting to find the whole place upside down."

He pulled back one of the big roller blinds from the raised skylight, and the afternoon sun streamed into the dusty studio. A couple more, rolled from the big north window, showed us a little square

with green grass and budding trees. But we only noted these things mechanically, for our eyes were at once turned elsewhere.

Bibi's little coffin lay upon a table in a corner. It was, as the chronicler had recorded, almost heart-shaped. The wood, though scratched and almost colourless with age, seemed in good condition, and the brass work had gone a dull green.

We pulled the table out into the light, and watched Banks in silence. Quickly he decided upon the line of attack; his deft fingers moved rapidly with chisel and wedge, and in an incredibly short space of time he put down his tools and gingerly lifted the lid.

A mass of wrappings confronted us, but these had rotted to the texture of that filmy paper one sees wrapped round oranges; and as we craned to look the body of Bibi was suddenly exposed.

What first struck us was that the head was not so very big after all, but it had evidently shrunk, for it was all wrinkled and withered. Indeed, it resembled nothing so much as an enormous medlar. The features were peaked away almost to nothing, but we could see, beneath the stiff lids, that the eyeballs were of great size, and that the lips must have had the beaky appearance described. The limbs and trunk were miserably shrunken, except the belly, which was protuberant and hard.

"The coffin's too deep," whispered Banks. "We'll have to lift him out."

He inserted his fingers with great care behind the head, and gradually slid one hand under the shoulders. Not without some repulsion, I worked mine in under the feet.

"Easy does it. He'll quite likely crumble up. Now."

We lifted him out lightly, but he proved to be much firmer than we had expected. A miserable object was Bibi, with the sun streaming down upon his withered little yellow body, stamped as it somehow was with a look of ineffable age.

Banks was breathing rather hard. "Now for it," he said. He picked up a smooth metal paper-knife, took hold of Bibi's head by the back, and gently worked the paper-knife into the shrivelled mouth. The point went easily in, and with a careful movement he prized the lower jaw a little way open, and proceeded to explore the mouth with the blade.

Suddenly his eyes lit up. "I've touched something hard," he cried, and in sudden excitement began to dig vigorously.

"Wait a minute—yes, by Jove, I've got it!"

With the point of the knife he worked a dark substance to the lips, and in another moment we were gazing in silence at a large black ring in the palm of his hand.

Giddas moistened his lips with his tongue. "Well," he said. "Well, this is a triumph for you, Banks. Indeed. Well."

Then something impelled me to look at the body. What, I don't know. There was the ring, the long lost Buckross ring, so strangely lost,

so wonderfully found. Yet suddenly I had to look at the body. Giddas did the same. And seeing us look, Banks abruptly turned his head and looked.

With a quick intake of breath he put down the ring, seized the body and began to cram it back into the coffin. I looked away—again I don't know why. Suddenly Banks burst into a stream of frantic oaths, and I turned to see him, his eyes glaring horribly, his whole face one contorted mask of utter loathing, striving with all his might to force Bibi down. And Bibi was struggling—struggling—I swear to God I saw his little brown legs writhing over the edge of the box.

Then came terror—sickening, soul-killing, panic terror—of a kind I have never known even in the most appalling nightmare : and in a flash I was rising, floating, in the air : we were all three rising, bobbing like corks on a sea of terror, and the furniture with us. My head was level with the skylight. I caught a glimpse of the trees outside ; up, thrusting up ; and all the while such fear as I pray I may never feel again.

Then, suddenly as I had risen, something came to my aid. I remembered the old Abbot's words. " My children, cast out fear. Cast out fear."

Slowly but strongly there dawned in me a consciousness of myself. I was no longer afraid. Each moment strengthened that inward core of knowledge and control. For the first time in my life I felt my personality gather itself to a point to resist deadly and unutterable evil. And as the power grew, I grasped it. Shutting my eyes,

clenching my hands, I began steadily to exert my will against the force that held us. The pressure was light at first, but grew and grew, until at last my whole consciousness was rigid with the strain. And in my heart I knew that I could do it. I can beat you, I said to myself grimly, I can, I can, I can.

And I was winning. I was coming down. We were all coming down. But the force was strong—stifling—malignant—awful. It beat in my brain, it shrieked in my ears. Then in hatred and loathing and strong clean anger I exerted not only my own will, but the will of the whole world, and my poor body was the focus of such power as nearly burst it asunder. Blackness roared before my senses.

It was over. We were standing on the floor. Giddas collapsed in a heap. Banks staggered over to the coffin, put the lid over it, and then was violently and horribly sick.

. . . . . .

There is little more to tell. The rest of the story was made public at the time; how the ring contained the clue, written, as Banks had surmised, upon a tiny folded piece of parchment; how Giddas succeeded in deciphering it; and how, finally, the treasure was located and recovered, not, as one would have expected, in the Abbey grounds, but at a spot measured from St. Leonard's Well, almost two miles distant; together with all the incidental and less important details.

All except one, that is. The day after the

incidents above described, three men stood in the stern of a motor-boat near the mouth of the Thames. Between them, on the seat, lay an odd-looking package, weighted heavily. The sun sparkled on the morning water as the boat ran out towards the open sea, and little green bubbles danced merrily in her wake.

When they had gone far enough, as they judged, the boat slowed down and described a wide curve. One of them rose, and with difficulty raised the package in his arms. Then he lurched forward and dropped it over the side.

All three stared for a few moments at the spot where it had sunk. Banks, straightening himself, broke the silence:

"And that's that," he observed.

"An' you expect us to swallow all that?" inquired Mr. Buck contemptuously.

"Possibly not, Mr. Buck," returned the narrator coolly. "People have strained at smaller gnats in my time . . . and swallowed larger camels."

Thereat the Professor was good enough to support his friend with the tribute of what has been called his fretsaw laugh. He was thinking to himself: "Not so bad, that! I must tell them that in Common Room next term. Henry Scott's retort on the Pornophilic Printer."

Henry Scott turned to the Professor.

"My dear fellow," he said kindly. "It is perhaps due to these weary travellers that we, who have been idling here on board, should entertain

them first—giving them, shall I say, time for a little more tranquillity wherein to recollect the emotions of their journey? Suppose you take up the running!"

Again uprose the voice of Mr. Buck, in almost querulous complaint:

"The kind of story that I like," he said, "is something what's *'appened*. Reel life. That is," he added, with a somewhat pitying glance at Professor MacWhirter-Smith, "when you've 'ad any. Now, your style of thing, Perfessor—of course, it's very high class and all that—sounds like a book—but all the same it's—it's——" he flapped his hands helplessly—"well, what I mean is, even when you are telling about something that's 'appened, according to you, you don't make it sound as if it did."

The Professor's eye, which had lighted up with a gleam of pleasure at Scott's invitation, now gleamed cold and a little deadly upon Mr. Buck.

"And what," he inquired, "do you demand of real life, Mr. Buck?"

"Something with a bit o' spice in it," returned Mr. Buck promptly. "Not but what," he added after a slight pause, "there was good stuff in that tale of yours about the German troops all 'aving to change their trousers in public, if you'd only 'ad the right way of telling it."

"*Dear* Professor MacWhirter-Smith," broke in the Lady of Fashion, impetuously bent on a defence of his feelings. But she was interrupted by a sharp sound of pain from the Poet.

"Don't!" he almost screeched, drawing up

his knees in anguish. They stared at him in amazement, until, half apologetically, but with the wailing voice of self-exoneration, he proceeded to explain. "You were positively rhythmic," he cried. "God knows how you might have gone on!——

> Dear Professor MacWhirter-Smith,
> Your stories, for me, have punch and pith.

Something like that. A veritable loathsome lilt. Haven't I had enough to endure already on this damned yacht of mine? The habit people have of walking up and down, up and down, as soon as they get on anything resembling a deck. *You've* nearly driven me crazy to-day already!" he blurted at Vivian Spencer.

"I?" exclaimed the Bureaucrat insolently.

"Yes: you walked up and down, up and down to the tune of—

> I have the honour to be (*pom*),
> Sir, your obedient servant (*pom*).

I had to go below and read Carlyle—Carlyle, mark you!—to get the better of it. And when I came up on deck, I'm hanged if you weren't still at it. But this time it was—

> Accept the assurance, Sir (*pom*),
> Of my highest consideration (*pom*)."

"How Lord Curzon must love yachting," murmured Peter Brown.

"Anyway, that's why I hate it," said the Poet. "You can't conceive. . . . All the time, there's

the engines too. And now," he almost shrieked, "now even the light wave lisps Greece!"

The ensuing long pause, during which the Professor struggled with his impatience, the Master Printer with his bewilderment, and the rest with their lack of gravity, was ended at the last by the failure of the first.

"I was about to observe that I might perhaps narrate—not altogether colloquially, I fear, yet (shall I say?) like a book of rather a lighter sort than our friend perhaps associates with my—my scholastic preoccupations...." He fixed his eye a little more leniently upon the Master Printer, then turned to Scott. "As you say, Scott, one begins to find a facility. . . ."

"Splendid!" said Mr. Buck, genially encouraging. "Go ahead, my boy!"

His boy—Professor of Zend Language and Literature in the University of Oxford—continued quietly to collect himself for a moment in order to propound yet further prolegomena.

"Freedom," he murmured, raising his weak old eyes towards the rosy heights where Delphi lay hid. "Greece. . . . Pagan freedom. . . . Miss Pogson was inquiring this afternoon about the Dionysiac orgies: what she most discreetly referred to as 'goings-on . . . that sort of thing.'" (Poor Miss Pogson was scarletly appalled to have her private quest for knowledge of a most delicate nature thus publicly proclaimed!) "The story of an old friend, as he confessed it to me before his death, recalls itself: an interesting gloss upon that most textually ancient example of oxymoron (it

occurs, of course, in the Zarathustrian codices), 'slavery is perfect freedom'—and its inevitable converse. Yes. . . ."

He began therewith:

THE FOURTH DAY'S TALE OF THE PROFESSOR.

THE PROFESSOR'S TALE

THAT SORT OF THING

By J. D. BERESFORD

I KNEW them both intimately, as we say. I knew him indeed more intimately than I have known anyone; knew him, perhaps, as well as it is possible for us to know any friend, or lover, or even ourselves. So much must necessarily be hidden. We know so little of the roots from which spring our passions or our impulses, our loves or our disgusts.

He—I will call him Andrew Grey—was at that time a young man of twenty-seven; a harried professor in never mind what university—which was how I first came to know him. He had married absurdly young, but he and his wife had no children. She, his wife that is to say, was the sort of young woman who so often catches the eye and entangles the desires of youth: pretty in a pert, common way; rather plump and vivacious; and, I must confess it or you will never understand Andrew's temptation, entirely selfish and unintelligent.

They were not well-off. He made, at the most, about £500 a year; and they lived in a little suburban villa, the centre of an admiring circle of still poorer neighbours that Mrs. Grey had gathered round her. And from that circle she received the kind of adoration and respect that was all she really cared for. Her husband's profession put him above the rank of the clerks and second-grade civil servants, who were their neighbours, and she condescended to them, as a minor royalty might condescend to a society of snobs.

Nearly every evening Andrew came home to some form of deadly entertainment in which he was expected to shine: book-teas, whist-drives, charades, or, perhaps, worst of all, mere conversation. And at the least sign of any remonstrance, Mrs. Grey would burst into tears, and then passionately point out to him that this was her only amusement in life. He had his books, of course; he was so clever and so superior; but was she to have nothing? And the tragedy of the affair lay in the fact that he could understand and sympathise with her claim; that he knew by that time how incapable she was of enjoying anything but the small flatteries and adulations of this unintelligent society. She had, indeed, the merest rudiments of what he understood by intelligence. Even the theatre bored her. She could not keep her attention on anything above the level of the music-halls or the most trivial of comedies.

Andrew found a measure of release, as so many other men and women do, in his work. He was ambitious with the ambition of the scientific mind.

He wanted to know ; to make some new discovery, however small, not in order to win recognition or money, but solely to add something to his own, and incidentally the world's, knowledge. He had the use of a laboratory, and he took to staying up there in the evening, and sometimes late into the night ; although his wife never failed to rate him when he came home.

" It was," he once said to me, " almost satisfying to observe the perfect regularity of her reactions. I could have plotted the curve of her tantrums according to the degree of aggravation she believed herself to have received. She never seemed to realise that she was repeating herself. If I were late home every night for a week, she would go through the same performance, with the same verve, and I might say, freshness, on each occasion. She would appear to be as much surprised, insulted, outraged, on the sixth night as on the first. She put the same astonishing vigour into my punishment."

Andrew's own reactions were far from regular. Sometimes he sulked ; sometimes he tried to argue as patiently as might be ; sometimes he pleaded with her to the verge of love-making; and sometimes he lost his temper outright. The last method was the only effective one. She never respected him until he became violent.

In the end she must inevitably have won. No man of Andrew's kind is capable of resisting, alone, the immensely powerful inertia of a mind like hers. Every scene between them drew upon his nervous resources, but not at all upon hers.

She had no imagination, and her spirit was never touched. It would have been just a matter of time, a year or two more or less, before she finally achieved her object, broke him in to do her will, if he had not . . .

He met Marion Roberts at a soirée given by his students. She also taught; though her subjects were not the same as his. She was tall, dark, decidedly statuesque. Her girl students liked her up to a point, but did not adore her. They thought her reserved, rather cold. She seemed to have no intimate friends. She wore glasses, dressed with a dignity that became her, and was just six months younger than Andrew.

Those were the outer aspects of Marion Roberts; the obvious things that nearly everyone saw from almost the same angle. From the outsider's point of view she was an easy person to describe. It was not what Andrew saw when he talked to her at that soirée. He found intelligence, calm, gentleness, understanding. He found all the qualities that bitter experience had taught him he ought to have looked for in a wife. And he thought Marion the loveliest, most adorable creature he had ever met.

And she? Oh! she was pining, wasting for romance. She lacked that something, and she knew it, which excited a man's imagination. The only men who had come within sight of making love to her had been younger than herself: shy, worshipping boys, whose worship would have withered at the first kiss. And at that first meeting she felt the stimulating, almost intoxicating quality

of Andrew's admiration. It was something she had definitely wanted.

They had agreed to meet again before they parted. There had so far been no confidences. She did not know then that he was married. And she went home to give rein to those dreams she had hitherto so steadily repressed—he to take his customary rating and to compare his wife with Marion.

He made the admission of his marriage at their second meeting, without any further confession, and she received his statement quietly. The fact had not been an element in her dreams of the night before, but when she heard it she suffered no shock of surprise. It was very wonderful that she, of all people, should not be shocked she told herself, but in some strange, inexplicable way it seemed to her *right* that he should be married.

" I don't know that there is any real reason why we shouldn't meet again ? " he said tentatively, just before they parted.

She pretended a faint surprise. " Oh no ! Why should there be ? " she asked.

" None ; none whatever," Andrew replied, looking down ; " unless . . ."

" Unless ? " she prompted him calmly.

" Oh ! I don't know," Andrew said, glancing into her handsome, rather inexpressive eyes for a moment, and finding no encouragement. " There is no ' unless,' " he concluded with a smile.

She hated herself a minute later for having been so unresponsive, but, after all, she had seen him only twice.

That was the first beginning of love-making between them, and it was not until their fifth meeting that he told her the truth about his home-life—in the Elgin Room of the British Museum one Saturday afternoon.

She listened very quietly—she appreciated the full value of this confession—and while she listened to his stumblings and repetitions and desperate searchings for quiet emphasis, she was coaching herself anew in the course that she had for more than a fortnight now, nervously but obstinately, determined to follow.

"I wonder if you would care to come back with me to tea, in my little flat?" she said steadily, when his rather incoherent, suppressed revelations had tailed out into silence. "It is so difficult to talk here."

They hardly spoke to one another on their way to the flat, and while she made tea for him, and while they drank it, they talked hurriedly in the manner of new acquaintances who nervously dread a silence.

And then the silence came, and they were afraid to break it. I hesitate to tell you how long the silence lasted, in which those two, sitting intensely still, thought so feverishly and so separately. I make no claim to omniscience in making that statement. I happen to know what each of them was thinking about during that protracted hesitation; and I may say that the woman's thought was the bolder of the two, the more determined.

She was not harassed by any consideration of the loyalty due to intimacies that, however fleshly,

had once been sweet. She had no memories of a youthful ideal that had found a temporary satisfaction; nor of the image, whether or not it had any origin in fact, of the generous and beautiful surrender made by the young and innocent woman whom he had known in the first weeks of his marriage. Marion's problem was more personal than his; and, in a sense, at once more selfish and more real.

It was growing dark; they were sitting within touch of one another, although they had not touched; and it was Marion who, at last, found the courage silently to stretch out her hand and take his.

And at that the current of thought and feeling began to flow from one to the other, so that in a few moments they found themselves talking as lovers without ever having made a beginning in speech; found themselves wading, swimming, drowning in the wonder of knowing that each had a marvellous amd most precious possession in the other; though, indeed, so rare and delicate were all their first raptures and ecstasies, that it was not until nearly a fortnight later that his wife could honestly have established her claim for a divorce.

Not that she ever made any such claim, for she never knew that her husband loved another woman. She lacked not only intelligence, but also that strange aptitude for intuitive knowledge, which with so many women takes the place of rational mental ability. And Marion and Andrew were compelled to chicane and dishonesty by their circumstances. An action for divorce would have

lost them their appointments; and neither of them had any other resources.

Now, I can see that by all the rules this liaison should have ended in some form of unhappiness for the two people concerned; perhaps in a growing realisation of their own deceit and unworthiness; in moral scruples and an uneasy conscience; in a tragic falling out of love; or worst of all in mere dullness and ennui, terminating in a gradual separation.

I know that something of this sort *ought* to have happened. I can tell you only that it did not. For three years it was a perpetual delight and joy to them both. They had found the romance of a secret liberty in a world of inhibitions and artificial restraints. Those quiet evenings at Marion's flat, when Andrew was supposed to be working late at the laboratory, were evenings spent among the isles of the blessed. Every stolen meeting entailed some risk; every kiss was earned by adventure; every embrace gained passion from their realisation that it was illegal.

You may, perhaps, find it a little difficult to understand from the picture I have given you of Marion that she was capable of such relaxation, such surrender to the joys of love, such gifts—if I may put it quite plainly—for playing, and entering into, the part of a mistress. But the difficulty, if it exists, is solely due to our habit of judging a woman by that semblance of herself which she chooses to display to the world. There was not probably one young woman in Marion's class who would not have been staggered and

incredulous if she had been told the details of her professor's secret life. But, I ask you, how many times have not you yourselves received staggering and incredible news of some woman of your acquaintance, and received it, perhaps, with the astounded comment: "Well! she was quite the very last person I should ever have suspected of *that* sort of thing." Oh! believe me, it is quite as often as not that "very last person" who is—er—well, *capable de tout*. . . .

Life wore another face for Andrew in those three years. It is true that he still had to endure the tortures of his own home life, but now he could suffer them as we suffer a pain from which we know that we shall presently find relief; so that we may even cherish the present agony to heighten the coming ecstasy. And he has told me that when he received the usual harangue from his wife after one of those evenings spent as she supposed in his laboratory, that he found a queer compensation in the knowledge that he really deserved her scolding. He was no longer tortured by the injustice and unreasonableness of her complaint; he could find comfort in saying to himself: "Ah! my dear, I wonder what you'd say if you knew the truth?"

Strange consolation! Yet for some men and women it is just such an outlet as this that gives relief to the ordered, mechanical rule of life. The need for adventure, for some whole-hearted breaking in secret of the rules of society is almost (I must stress that "almost") essential to them. To break those rules openly and defiantly may be,

indeed, more magnificent, but for such as Andrew and Marion it gives less satisfaction. They wanted both worlds, and for a time they enjoyed them both—the world of respect, of intellectual society, of the ordered life on the one hand; and on the other the world of imaginative delight, of fantasy, of a hidden liberty. And in their present enjoyment of either world it was a joy to them to think of the other, whether as a state from which they had escaped or as a state to which they could presently return.

Their tragedy—for poetic justice in surely the queerest possible form overtook them—came by way of the very liberty they once believed themselves to have so ardently sought. But they did not recognise it when it came.

Andrew's wife was caught by the influenza epidemic—the famous epidemic of '90–'91. She had a severe attack, but the attacks of that date were not dangerous, unless aggravated by other complications; which she avoided. She was, so far as her bodily health was concerned, well on the way to recovery when she committed suicide by drowning herself in three feet of water.

Andrew was distressed, immensely distressed; but he had no reason for blaming himself as having in any way determined her death. She had had no suspicion of his unfaithfulness; the strange impulse to suicide had arisen solely from the depression of mind which was a characteristic symptom consequent on that particular epidemic.

He did not see Marion again until nearly a week after the inquest, but then he could keep away

no longer, and went to find her at her flat. They were unusually subdued that evening. The tragedy hung over them. They both of them disliked the feeling that they might in any way be going to profit by it. Not until it was nearly time for him to go, did Andrew say :

" We are free, at last, Marion."

" Perfectly free," she said quietly.

" Fate meant us for one another. We have always believed that."

" Always," she agreed.

" And now . . ."

" We must wait at least a year," she said.

" Six months," he protested. " I refuse to wait more than six months." And then unable to interpret her expression, he added : " Marion ! you have no sort of doubt ? You want to marry me ? "

" No sort of doubt, dear," she assured him.

" But ? "

She looked round her little sitting-room. " We have been very happy together here," she said. " I was only wondering if perhaps we should miss something ? "

They were married seven months later, but the realisation of what they had missed came to them so gradually, that it was years before they realised how Fate had punished them by giving them what they had desired.

At first fantasy sufficed ; but in the routine of married life a husband forgets to be a lover, a wife to remain, also, a mistress ; and the world of secret delight was lost to them. And once lost

there came a day when they faced it bravely—it could never again be recovered.

For her perhaps—I am not sure—the ostensible world may have been enough. She had two children; she found an occupation in political work connected with the growing demand for woman's suffrage; she kept her figure, and her friends envied her.

For him, I know all too well that it was not enough; but henceforth no way of escape was open to him. Even if he had wished to do it, and he did not, he could never have deceived Marion. But his tragedy did not lie there, not in the loss of any physical excitement or satisfaction. Rather was it to be found in his gradual, though ultimately complete, realisation that all his imagined love for Marion, and hers for him, had been nothing but a fantasy. If there had been no obstacle, he would never have believed himself to be in love with her. She had represented for him what, perhaps, the Dionysian legends had represented for the starved minds and suppressed bodies of the poets of ancient Greece—a dream of Liberty, the fantasy of the slave. Where there is no restriction, the thought of Freedom brings no satisfaction. Freedom, indeed, from what?

They were a little incoherent and embarrassed in their murmurs of thanks. It was one thing, they probably felt, for those of them who were of the right age and type to be calmly outrageous in this admittedly unconventional give-and-take of narrative; but an old man—a don—must be

indecorous, however discreetly he may deal with the indiscreet.

Then the Master Printer guffawed, himself far less embarrassed than pleasantly surprised.

"That's jam all right," he said approvingly. "But there you are, you see: most people wraps a bit of powder up in their jam, but your way of doing it, Perfesser, is to wrap your jam up in powder."

The Poet—with the inconsiderate rudeness of his kind—had gone below half-way through the Professor's tale, and reappeared with a manuscript which he studied with what seemed to be almost a deliberate disregard of the narrator, then concluding. Henry Scott had intended to call upon the Poet next, since he was the third of the ship-board trio. But, disgusted with his behaviour, he changed his mind and would have asked one of the women to tell the next tale, as soon as a sufficient interval had elapsed, had not the Poet now prevented him by abruptly cutting in on the heels of Mr. Buck's pronouncement.

"I've got a thing here," he said, "which I've written since we left Boulogne. And thank God," he continued with a vicious scowl at the Master Printer, "it isn't in the least like what you call real life!"

"No, young man," retorted Mr. Buck with the most refreshing, vigorous readiness, "'coz when real life was invented they never thought of you, and when you come along to be set up they was out of sorts, so they just slipped in a lot o' quads!"

"Are you quite sure, Mr. Herrick," inquired

Mrs. Dane-Vereker with great sweetness, "that there is still light enough to read by?"

"Quite!" he snapped; and then lowered his head and plunged, a little hurriedly, into

THE FOURTH DAY'S TALE OF THE POET

UNDINE, THE LAST ADVENTURE OF THE CHEVALIER ERRANT

By EDGELL RICKWORD

THE latest developments in armament had rendered his tactics ineffectual. Besides, the change in the general attitude to romance was such that his profession itself had become practically obsolete. He had always been, though he would scarcely admit it, on the side of established right. In his last adventure, the Princess whom he had rescued from a singularly tenacious dragon refused point-blank to return to her parents. She had extracted from him the key of the castle, which stood on an island in a lake, the lake of the Isola Bella, thence she floated a Company for the exportation of canned sturgeon (the water abounded in all kinds of coarse fish) and the manufacture of Tyrian purple from the heads, tails, and other by-products. The Chevalier Errant had been obliged to leave her after

a certain unpleasantness, a slight impatience merely of the Princess at his ignorance of commercial chemistry. But he thought it expedient for his dignity to retire, and they parted with no ill-feeling. Indeed, the knight received a prospectus of each new series of shares issued by the Company.

Such were the circumstances which, with approaching age, induced him to retire from public life. By disposing of some of his souvenirs he was able to purchase a small villa on the shores of this same lake, though the market in association values was so sadly reduced that he was able to maintain no considerable style. Yet, sitting in his summer-house near the water's edge he felt pleasantly content as he watched the flowered chintz curtains to the lattice-windows of his little bedroom blown fluttering among the branches of wisteria blossom.

He was engaged on one of the most adventurous portions of his memoirs, and as he wrote a faint evocation of the old ecstatic frenzy stirred his limbs. The lake glowed in the afternoon sun, the opposite shore obscured in a purple veil. The island of the princess stood up to eastward lifting a dark finger into the sky, though whether of rock or turret his old eyes could not discern. The aroma of all the beauty he had freed drifted over his soul, softening the callosities of age and bringing him almost to the heroic sentimentalism of boyhood. Suddenly he turned, attracted to the haze of the lowering sun, in which he seemed to see a slight figure coming silently towards him.

She came gliding over the water, a ridge of foam sparkling at her feet: at the tips of her slender feet shod in the darkest of green crocodile leathers. She was clad in green, from the narrow shoes with tapering heels so high she seemed to stand on tip-toe, to the toque of imitation river-weed, pressed over her black hair, which too had such shades in it as deep water has. From her shoulders hung a cloak of Worth, its tone repeating that of her shoes and head-dress, tightening in at the knees where it met and accentuated the misty river-grass gossamer of her paler stockings. Her parasol was of jade and her gloves of the dyed scales of the fresh-water rymen. Out of the delicate white face, its outline dimmed by the coils of hair, her eyes glowed dully in the blue hollows of weariness. Her mouth small, red, and full with the pathetic richness of passion. As she reached the shore the Chevalier, who had long ago risen, bowed very low and presented his arm for her assistance to his dwelling.

She accepted in silence, and in silence they made their way to the house. Dulcinella served tea from a small enamelled urn, but before taking her cup the stranger unfastened the dull silver clasp of her cloak. The stuff fell away softly leaving her bare, save for her stockings, and in the dusk of the late afternoon her body glowed like water moulded to woman's form, tangible, but internally fluid and bright with curving flame.

It was something more than force of habit which brought the Chevalier to his knees, and we know not what jaded gallantries his sincere but

stereotyped homage would have proferred, had not the sorrow in her eyes smitten him to an unaccustomed sense of actuality. There must come to many men, at least to those for whom woman's beauty is the symbol of eternal and unassailable beauty, moments of the intensest anguish, when they see this beauty poised, at its very rarest, on the summits of melancholy, tumbled from that exquisite stability into the ruinous valley of uncontrollable tears. That this Being, worshipped as a goddess should be, even more cruelly yoked to circumstance than ourselves, a lagging companion on our infinite journey, though it produce at first the pain of disillusionment, is ultimately the source of the only sharp and permanent voluptuousness; that mingled of protection and domination.

He remained silent in respect for her tears, for he could find no words that would not have appeared insincere. Presently he rose and placed some logs on the fire, making it sparkle and roar faintly, like a dutiful caged lion.

The Chevalier cleared his throat.

"I must have a wood-fire," he said, "it reminds one of the good old times. These logs are obtainable at the grocer's shop in the village." He was going to add "should you require any," but the sight of the little pools of water which had fallen from her shoes saved him from such maladroitness.

He listened for a time to the low sound of her grief, which was not a human snuffling, but the melody of a trickling stream broken by tiny falls and mossy boulders.

"It is so peaceful by the fire," she whispered at

last, and then, in the complete abandonment of unhappiness, " I can never go away."

If the Chevalier hesitated for a moment it does not reflect on the benevolence of his nature, but he had been brought up in a godly family. Besides, he had never completely given up a belief in the succubi who, in the form of beautiful but corrupt women, creep from the waters of lakes, and twining round the souls of unwary men lure them to death and hell in dark boggy places.

" Another lady, sir," Dulcinella announced from the doorway.

" Hullo, darling," said the blonde heavy girl, going across and kissing the other, who did not return this demonstration of affection, but raising her hand slightly :

" The Chevalier Errant : Miss Daphne Pilloner."

Miss Pilloner, heartily and to the discomfort of the knight, " Pleased to meet you." And to her friend, " Say old thing, you must come along. The Comte de la Maison Lewis, Old Harry, you know, he's kicking up a dust. You promised to go to the Moonlight Symphony with him to-night."

The other drew her cloak together as if to rise, but turned such wide appealing eyes to the Chevalier that he hesitated no longer, but seized the horn of a unicorn which hung by a brass chain from the ceiling and blew a long hollow blast. " Forgive me," he apologised, seeing fear as well as pity on the face of his later visitor. " It is a custom-sentimental from the olden times."

Dulcinella appeared in answer to the summons.

"You will prepare the guest-room," he ordered.

Daphne rose with the air of a business woman, and as she was going whispered to her friend, "Wish you luck, my dear. Treat him well."

"I hope you will make my house completely your own," said the Chevalier when the door was closed. "Dinner will be served at eight o'clock." And, with an imaginative sympathy, "You will perhaps excuse me if I do not dress. I have so much copy to complete which must positively catch the early mail—my contract with the American publishers, you know—time-tables, efficiency. One's poor style suffers." And bowing, he withdrew.

He waited dinner for half an hour, and when at last Dulcinella brought a message to say that the lady was indisposed and would not take dinner, he turned to the meal without appetite. He finished quickly and roamed discontentedly round the room and out into the hall. On a table there lay a visiting-card, and he read with difficulty in the gloom:

MDLLE UNDINE,
Syndicat International
d'Artistes Lyriques.

Tel. 0990.

Sighing, he turned towards the stairs.

On the way to his bedroom he noticed that the door of the guest-room was open, and feeling it to be empty he looked in.

Two candles burned on the dressing-table, with

their reflections in wood and glass—white flowers standing in a pool; their flames trembled as if about to rise.

A misty nightgown lay like a deserted spirit on the bed. The room was freshly scented with the wind from the garden. Yet its emptiness troubled the Chevalier, troubled him as the problem of Undine's coarse acquaintance, Miss Pilloner, had done, and he feared the necessity which drove her out, when she had apparently accepted his hospitality as a refuge. For if ever creature might find repose, in the serene beauty of this room it should have been possible.

Back in his own room he tried to sleep, but the influences of the night were too persistent—the harmony of moon and water, of light and fern; movement crystallised into fronds and matter shining into movement. Away in the distance a stream flowed through a shallow valley into the lake. Its banks were pine-shadowed and soft with fallen needles, and such thin bright green grass as grows under pines. Under the moon it became a place of another creation and the body mooning there strayed with deluded senses from trees of brazen rock to flowers lustrous as water, and dabbled mazed feet in transparent silver. Here came the creatures from beneath the lake and the inhabitants of the glaciers above the opposite shore; thin forms of water and of ice drawn there by the melody of the stream, drawn into glittering arabesques by the rhythm of the stream; bound like sand to the vibration of a string.

* * * * *

The moon was rising to the zenith and the rustle of many spirits leaving their caves persuaded the Chevalier to seek some relief from his vague dissatisfaction. He left his house and made his way towards the stream, whence a soft illumination arose. When he entered the valley that which had seemed, at a distance, a wheel of crystal in slow revolution, resolved itself into an intricate figure composed of the movement of many shining forms.

His notions of cosmography were derived from the Platonic System, and these were inadequate to explain the profound inclinations, the trepidations consequent, all the complex eurythmic of this celestial valley. Besides, he had ever been insensitive to abstract harmony; the palpitations of warm veins, the heavings of a white and downy bosom were more to him than stellar tragedies. It was no fundamental curiosity but his instinct to quiet the turmoil in a human heart which had drawn him towards this field of emotionless forces.

As each form, with immobile limbs, swung past him, he scanned each feature for some recognisable trait, but they bore no expression with which he could sympathise. The high foreheads and firmly moulded chins which might have betokened nobility; the swelling lips and heavy-lidded eyes of the passionate; the rigorous nose-line of the austere, all these familiar meanings were subdued to the harmony of the whole, to a hard, unyielding beauty, whose significance he could no more divine than that of an eddy of leaves caught for a

moment (and for all time) in the steely currents of the winds.

Though he seemed to have stood there many hours he had not yet detected the rhythm of the movement, or whether one oscillation had been yet completed; the whole was perhaps too vast and complicated for him to perceive. The continuity was beginning to numb him, when, from a dark alley, two others joined the circle near him, up-stream, as it were, to his position. One figure of light and one of shade, clasped breast to breast. That it was Undine he could not doubt, but whose was the shadow that lay on her breast like weed on the surface of a lake? Whose the tall black figure with the corpse-like mouth covered in drooping hair? As they came near him the Chevalier stiffened in anticipation, then gazed full on the face of Undine, uplifted to the moon and pale under its cold light. Slowly she turned her eyes towards him, and the suffering that showed in her features called up all the pity in his soul. But as the desire to console her overwhelmed him the arabesque was broken and the figures flew glittering in every direction like scattered glass; some to the waters of the lake, to the glaciers, to the mountain streams, and the light fell softly through tangled branches on to the wavering, untrodden grass.

. . . . . .

At breakfast she seemed frailer than before: her frock shimmering and light as the haze that obscures a waterfall. The Chevalier trembled as he passed her the toast, her sole nourishment.

Even inquiries as to the comfort of her accommodation were prohibited him by his clandestine visit to the valley, and he found it exceedingly difficult to converse.

But at last he achieved sufficient resolution to ask if he might have the honour of showing her his garden. Together they passed out into the morning that was still fresh, so that their feet struck sparks of dew from the grass growing between the flags of the path. With considerable artistry the garden had been arranged to have a natural appearance, as if blind forces had for once accidentally combined to bring design into profusion. On a gently swelling bank the wild hyacinths lifted blue and white porcelain towers above the forest of fine grass, and seemed chiming limpidly to some joyous Mass as the breeze shook their hanging bells. Undine knelt where the blue clustered more thickly : as a cloud passes across a summer sky, so her hand lingered softly among them. When she rose a cloud of colour lay on her cheeks and then sank slowly back into the veins to her heart, and was lost in that warm flood. But in the Chevalier's whitening mind it left a warm stain on which Time showed vainly its shrouds, each delicate as a woman's veil, but together remorseless as winding-sheets of lead.

She shrank from the fierce tiger-lilies whose five gleaming tongues curved to lick her as she passed, but paused a moment before the humorous exuberance of the tulips, like the fat wives of merchant-peers, standing in stiff glaring stuffs with careful dignity.

He was leading her all the time towards a particular spot, where a tall beech tree laid its shadow beside a pool. "Here," he said, when they stood beneath the brown metallic leaves, "here is that corner of my garden which is not merely decorative. It is rarely trodden, and since I settled here no woman's foot has brightened it. I call it the Unicorn Plot, and when, wearied by his eternal pursuers, that angelic beast seeks respite for a while, he may lie here in security from hoof and fang. It was here that I found the horn now used for a summons, shed after a thousand years. On one Christmas Eve the new horn was grown, and my untutored maid, the beast tossing in his pain and the new horn so dazzling white under the frosty stars, believed the great archangel Gabriel twirled his flaming sword at the entrance to our poor Eden."

She seemed not to heed his last words and remained in deep contemplation of the spot, but he was so engrossed by his subject that he continued with an almost discourteous enthusiasm.

"On yonder patch of tilled ground you may observe some small bean-like plants. There I have cultivated a quantity of the unicorn's invariable nourishment. The root of the liquorice provides fire for his veins, and here I have raised a particular bitter grass, that, when sated with the sucrous juices, he may sharpen his palate and look again through clear eyes. For it is peculiar to the creature that when desire is satisfied the tissue of the eyes breaks down into a substance insensitive to light, so its mind gazes through

obscure windows at a sunless world. Between the gross necessity of absorbing nutriment and the vital necessity of edged sense to elude his hunters, without this tonic grass ever at hand he could hardly for long retain his freedom."

"Your metaphysical symbolism, my dear Chevalier, is industrious, but"—a voice behind him interrupted—"but you will be readier perhaps to forgive my intrusion if Mademoiselle would condescend to present me."

There was really no need for Undine to do this; the drooping moustache identified him as her partner of the previous evening, and the knight was not surprised to find that this was the Comte de la Maison Lewis.

"Industrious, but, as I was going to say, it is a trifle *démodé*. The point is that it is desire itself that actually creates our world. Another point is"— to the Chevalier's disgust he produced each idea like a traveller showing a new brand of woollen vest—"another point is that if we desire imperiously we are Eastern emperors, and need but clap our hands for a palace of ice to fling sparkling minarets at the frustrated sun. We may hold extraordinary communion on snow couches. Time is but the illusory revolution of a jaded appetite. Desire burns in eternity. See"—stepping to a tinkling fountain that rose from the navel of a recumbent nymph—"see, Desire burns not in illusive Time." And he plucked the jet like a flower and raised it high above his head, where it drooped its still plumes.

"The fountains of the heart admit of the same

procedure, do they not, Undine?" he sneered, replacing with contemptuous familiarity the jet.

Undine could say nothing, but, shivering, pressed closer to the Chevalier, and did not smile again till the Count had taken his leave.

Nevertheless, the same evening after dinner she returned to the drawing-room for a moment to tell her host that she was going to a ball with the Count, and she would by no means permit the Chevalier to escort her to the rendezvous, but hurried from the room and was seen crossing the garden like a moon in her flying scud.

The Chevalier was perturbed. It seemed evident that she had come to him for succour, that she was subdued to some monstrous tyranny, the shadows beneath her eyes told him as much—but still he was at a loss. His old brain spun round and round like a cog-wheel out of gear, in the orbit it had swung for years, but there was nothing it might clutch and it merely tore at his sensibility. Had there been a dragon now, with however many flamboyant mouths, he would have challenged him with a quiet mind. But there was nothing, nothing but a tall, rather dubious nobleman, with an unnatural philosophy and a repulsive moustache. That he exercised some sinister control over Undine appeared indubitable, but that she should submit with no more resistance than to seek temporary refuge in his house, and not even take full advantage of that, was more than perplexing. With a handsome young fellow—at this point his cerebration had reached his limit of endurance, but it had at

least brought into play old motives which were better than none at all.

As with anyone whose mental faculties are impaired, fatigued, or organically undeveloped, the Chevalier decided to do something. He strode with determination into the garden where the utter lack of any indication as to which way he should move irritated him with its hint of futility. He stamped up and down the path, gradually rousing the old warrior in him. Suddenly, on the dark grass of the Unicorn Plot, he noticed a white shimmering object. Lying in the grass like a fallen lily was Undine's long glove. He picked it up and caressed the soft skin. He imagined the hand it had protected from the coarse world, a hand even whiter than the doeskin itself,

"Tender as 'twere a jelly gloved,"

he quoted in the old conceited fashion, and coolly fragrant as the lily it had seemed. Yet in its whiteness there was a mysterious element foreign to the unsophisticated virginity he associated with white. Like all old men in face of something they had not noticed before, he decided to call that indefinable peculiarity "modern." It had the modern whiteness of a tortured virginity, of a hand refined to abominable practices, retaining by this same sophistication its unassailable isolation. Many such remarkable suggestions harassed his inflamed sensibility, and tying the glove round his arm like a favour he followed the now obvious path which led from the Plot towards a wood skirting the farther border of the lake.

Though the moon was nearly full, he walked

through darkness. One spot in his mind was incandescent, and that threw light only within. Forgotten experiences were now revived to beat a long-disused sense to a frenzy of pain. His too-immediate imagination thronged with images of Undine in postures of humiliating and agonising passion. That she, so exquisitely delicate, might acquiesce and even invite such degrading contact, except under invisible compulsion, he could not conceive, and of such influence he now became certain, the Count, with his glorification of desire, must be the origin.

At last, moving amid these exasperating visions, as though down the galleries of Elephantis, he came to the hut of a forester, whose lighted windows attracted him towards it. As he approached he heard first a confused wailing, and then the most rending, pitiful screams. This was so appropriate to his imaginings that he rushed to the door, burst it open, and stood, paralysed with horror, at the scene before him.

On a chair by the large open fireplace, her gleaming satin cloak trampled at her feet, her hair dishevelled and her frail gown torn down, leaving the bosom bare, Undine was bowed. Standing over her and obscuring one side of her body was the Count; one of his hands raised threateningly a knout-like object. Without an instant's hesitation the Chevalier flung himself at the bigger man and sought his throat with his fingers.

"Chevalier, Chevalier, what are you doing?" cried a small, sweet voice. "Do be more careful, you nearly injured Baby."

As he had by this time forced his opponent to the ground, the Chevalier turned to look at Undine, and as he did so he all but collapsed beside the Count.

Lying on Undine's bosom was a tiny doll-like creature with a black head fastened to her breast. Its arms and legs moved regularly, pushing up its mother's flesh in dazzling ripples. In Undine's glassy breast a faintly blue liquid curled through minute tunnels.

In the silence which followed, a silence deepened by the gurgitations of the infant, a ghastly cry arose from a corner near the fireplace.

"Damn that brat," shouted the Count, getting up and rushing to the fireplace where he furiously waved a rattle at a hidden child.

"And now, my dear Chevalier," he said when the turmoil was subdued, "I must thank you for this unexpected visit."

The Chevalier was too downcast to reply, and gazed appealingly at Undine, who in her maternal intimacy seemed more human and approachable than ever before.

"You think, no doubt," she said, tacitly answering his appeal, "that you are owed an explanation."

The baby dropped, asleep, into the hollow of her arm, and with a web of lace she dried the nipple where an opal drop had lingered. Then, having slipped her shoulders into her gown and arranged her corsage she arose, stowed away the child in a cradle, and turned in silence to a mirror, her hands weaving magic in the glens of her hair.

Her silent grace mocked the Chevalier and he felt sick with regret.

"Explanations, my dear Chevalier," resumed the Count's unpleasant voice. "Explanations are food of Tantalus in the old myth, the water that ever recedes from his lips and the apple that evades his teeth. Such is the phantasmagorial stuff with which you would be nourished. You were accorded an experience, and the possibility of a development to a more subtle experience. . . ." The terminology and deliberate repetitions of the Count were daggers in the Chevalier.

Undine was now again wrapped in her cloak, and stood by the door, watching for a moment the two men; then she disappeared into the wood.

"You had this opportunity," continued the Count, "and you deliberately forwent it in order to mould it to some preconceived notion of suitability in your insolent intelligence. It is too late to do anything for you, my friend. I am sorry, but it is so. Can the leopard change his spots or an old knight his metaphysic?"

Then, after a pause in which he arranged the two cradles in front of the fire. "These images of desire [pointing to the two babes] may perhaps be the means of teaching you a lesson, though I have little faith even in demonstration as a method of revealing truth. Had you only exercised birth-control on your mental children—but I am afraid your mind is irremediably encumbered. The one honest little impulse you had stirred uneasily under the heap of debris, but beyond

rattling a skeleton or two it was completely ineffectual." Then he slung the two cradles and their contents one after another on to the fire, where a terrific draught swept them immediately up the chimney.

Walking sadly home the Chevalier heard laughter in each brook and glade, and as he neared the valley of the dance he was aware of another universe of which his was the reflection in a tarnished mirror. He saw Undine revelling in her eternal sorrow, and many forms bowed over their pool-held images in fixed contemplation. The spirits gathered thickly under a moon-lit fall, bathing together in iridescent communion; he saw others with gentle passion embracing under the delicate larches, while some few wandered restlessly alone under the thick shadows of the ancient trees. But as he neared his home he gradually faded from that world to which he was an unsympathetic visitant, and only the glove on his arm remained to convince him of the reality of an ecstatic world, strange to the recurrent sensations which dallied every day at his board and bed.

"Thank you, Mr. Herrick," said the Lady of Fashion quietly and sedately, her hands folded in her lap—as though a fellow guest had just concluded a piano solo which she did not quite appreciate, but knew she ought to.

"Clever idea," observed Vivian Spencer shortly. He was really making amendment. He naturally detested the Poet, and, having shown it, felt now

the more in honour bound to confess the real ability he had unexpectedly put forth.

"Last time you told a tale—leastways, it was a poem, and as a matter of fact I always like to encourage poetry for the good of trade, because the setting's fat—you put me to sleep. I was just about dropping off this time too, only I'd 'ad a good snooze this afternoon, and there was one or two things as woke me right up." And Mr. Buck leered grossly and forgivingly upon Mr. Herrick.

"I felt myself—if I may interpose as a suggestion, not to Mr. Herrick alone——" began Father Anthony, in almost a professional voice.

But he was interrupted by the Poet rising with a growl, thrusting the manuscript into his pocket, and departing along the deck.

"What *can* you do with a fellow like that?" sighed the sociable, amiable Mr. Peter Brown.

"Appalling bounder!" murmured Vivian Spencer.

"Rather a difficult fellow, one must agree," confessed Henry Scott. "But, remembering that we are, in a sense, guests aboard his yacht . . . owing to circumstances over which we have no control. . . ." His glance flickered lightly over Turpin and Judas, side by side on the outskirts of the group; and with that he recalled himself briskly to the business of the evening.

"If one of the ladies will oblige?" he inquired. "Miss Pogson?"

Miss Pogson at once looked dutifully to the Lady of Fashion. The latter, ever since their departure for Paris, had been *so* kind, so really intimate and friendly. . . .

"Yes, Miss Pogson," she said, "please do."

"Well, of course," Miss Pogson said, "I'm ready to do my best. But—where you're all so clever and . . . well-informed—had so many experiences I mean—it's difficult for me to—to compete. Mr. Buck——" (She gave him, too, the tribute of a glance and deferential reference: in Paris he had really been most gallant and generous and attentive, to her as well as to Mrs. Dane-Vereker.) "Mr. Buck was saying that he liked 'real life'—'something that's happened.' Well, of course, I was thinking that so few of us have really had any real life——"

"I should hope not, Miss!" interposed Mr. Buck, scandalised.

"——but all the same I could tell you something . . . something that did really happen . . . if it's not too dull. . . ." She stopped nervously, and waited. They gave her the necessary polite encouragement and patiently settled down to hear

THE FOURTH DAY'S TALE OF THE SCHOOLMARM

THE SCHOOLMARM'S TALE

ON ONE OF THE SIDE ALTARS

By BLAIR

GRETA FANE was the youngest of a family of four; and a family of four would be considered improvident, I suppose, for the class of people that they were. "Middle-class" is the vaguest possible label, isn't it? At one end you get people who are almost county—even, perhaps, people who *were* county once: younger sons and that sort of thing who have gone into business and don't have estates, but *almost* manage to run to footmen. Isn't that so? There always has to be a border-line, of course; and I'm not sure that the Fanes weren't very near the one at the other end, where the middle-class is almost the working-class. Certainly, the best-paid sort of artisan, and without any doubt at all the smaller kind of tradesmen—people who generally said "sir" to Greta's father—were in much comfortabler circumstances than the Fanes were, and for *them* a matter of even six children wouldn't have been so improvident—almost apart from the

fact of the Fanes having to keep up appearances, you know, in the way that even the poorest middle-class people can't help trying to do—have *got* to do, in fact. Appearances are the tools of their trade—the last thing they can afford to let go.

Mr. Fane had been a clerk when he and Mrs. Fane were married; and when at last Greta was off his hands, he was still a clerk, although a head clerk now, and almost worn out. Of course, I don't know—one is always vague about this kind of thing—but I should think that if his salary amounted to two hundred and fifty a year at the time that he was married, and rose to . . . well, not more than three hundred and fifty, I'm sure, when he was head clerk, that was as much as he ever earned all his life. And with four children, you know, his expenses must always have done more than keep pace with his increases of income.

They were right-down conscientious parents, Mr. and Mrs. Fane were. It's very important to remember that. They lived and struggled, I'm sure, simply to do the best for their children. If they hadn't done that, they might have been able to take a bit more thought for their own old age. People in their class of life can look at the thing in two ways, I think. They can let the children grow up anyhow—just rough it and get along as best they can—while they (the parents, I mean) are being provident: saving up for the time when they can't work, and saying to the children, "Well, there'll be something for you when I'm gone, anyway." Or else they can do the way Mr. and Mrs. Fane did: hardly think about

themselves at all ; put every penny they can scrape into bringing up the children and giving them the best start in life ; and thinking, if they think about it at all, " Oh, well : our children will help us when we need it." They cast their bread upon the waters, you know—but not really thinking about its returning to them : just because they think it's their duty to do it.

It's hard to say which turns out best for the children—I mean, in the way things may go sometimes. But, however they may go, I do still think that the Fane kind of parents are the best and the most unselfish . . . though it may work out very hard, and if only they could have foreseen. . . .

Anyway, there it was. It's true there was the insurance. That wasn't much. I think it was about £400 to begin with and worked up to nearly £600 with bonuses. But that was to be paid at Mr. Fane's death. An endowment one might have been better ; for, you see, Mr. Fane had no pension to look forward to. It wasn't a very good firm he worked for—not very good to their employees, I mean. Of course, Mr. Fane never imagined but what he'd keep on working right until he died ; and then there'd be the insurance, and Mrs. Fane would live with one of the children. I'm sure that's the way he looked ahead, and as much as he ever looked ahead. He never had had illnesses or been away from his work all his life, and so he couldn't see himself not at work. Whereas as it happened . . . but wait : I must explain first.

First there was a girl—Fanny—then the two boys, and then Greta. In cases like this, they say, it's generally the youngest that has the best of it. The parents are afraid to launch out too far with the eldest, because there are the young ones coming on, and they can't see their way clear. But they can often be much more ambitious over the youngest, if the others are off their hands, and things easier all round than they have been. Just when the load is easing off them, they go and pile it on still more. I suppose it's because they've never been used to going without it.

Well, then, the best they felt able to do for Fanny was to try and get her into the Post Office. And they did that all right. But very soon Fanny got married—she was the pretty one, there's no doubt about that—married to an artist who lived in two rooms in Chelsea. It's funny, perhaps. Fanny had been rather sore about the Post Office : thought it was much too vulgar ; but Mr. and Mrs. Fane had rather pushed her into it, because it was safe, you know, with the pension and all. And then there was a—a young grocer, actually, who fell violently in love with her : had got himself introduced to her at a public dance. And it's perfectly certain that she liked him well enough—quite as much as she did the artist, I'm sure—till she found out what he was. Well, he was much better off than the artist, and now he's rich—got multiple shops of his own, in a small way, in the suburbs—but Fanny wouldn't have him. She actually preferred two rooms in Chelsea—but later on it was a squashy little cheap flat—with

the artist, because, she said, socially speaking an artist could be *anything*.

Hers was never much—and, as a matter of fact, in *that* way I always thought he was a lot commoner than the grocer. They got along in an irregular, hand-to-mouth kind of way, and, though they only had one child, they were always more or less in need of help still from Mr. and Mrs. Fane, instead of being able to help *them*.

The two boys were Charlie and Jack, with just two years between them. I don't know why—I suppose if I was a parent myself I should get just the same sort of ideas into my head, though, Heaven knows, I've had bitter enough experience of them, as a school mistress—but Mr. and Mrs. Fane made up their minds that Charlie should have a commercial training, complete with French and Spanish, so that he could get one of these well-paid posts in a business house abroad—South America or somewhere; and Jack was to be an architect. (You see how they were gradually getting more ambitious?) I think they were impressed with the possibilities of architecture by always living in one of the new suburbs, where building, building, building was flourishing around them year in and year out. Such houses as the Fanes had to live in must mean profits for somebody.

Of course, it happened that Charlie had rather an engineering turn of mind, and could *not* learn French or Spanish to save his life. At the technical school he went in for machine drawing and things of that sort on the quiet; and then, quite suddenly, when he was eighteen, he got his first job, through

the headmaster of the school, in the drawing office of some engineering firm in the Midlands. As for Jack, architecture hadn't the slightest attraction for him ; and as soon as he understood that Mr. and Mrs. Fane were really beginning to scrape together a premium for him to go into an office as a pupil, he spoke out like a man and said what he really wanted to do. He was the adventurous one of the family, and all he wanted, he said, was his outfit and a passage abroad to one of the Colonies. He said he'd make good somehow and not be any more burden to anybody.

And he got his way in the end, and actually went out to a job on a farm in Australia. (And after Mr. and Mrs. Fane had paid for his outfit and passage from what they had saved for his premium, they gave him the rest to take with him, as a bit of ready money.) He was the nearest to Greta—though there was a full four years between them—and she adored him at that time : he was just that kind of boy, you know—bold and handsome and lovable. She said she could never get on at home without him, and there was a kind of promise between them—*you* know—that when he'd got on and got a home of his own, she'd go out and housekeep for him.

Well, his going, and Charlie's beginning to keep himself, left the coast quite clear for Greta ; and Mr. and Mrs. Fane made up their minds to keep her on at school and give her a real good education and see what came of it. She ought to get a good post as a schoolmistress, anyway. And so—I suppose she was fairly clever—she went right on

through the High School, and passed her Higher Locals, and got her Higher Certificate, and went to a Training College when she was nineteen, and eventually *did* get quite a good post, for a start, as a High School mistress. She had specialised in historical geography, and so she didn't command at all a bad salary for her age, and as salaries go in the teaching profession.

In fact, just about this time life was seeming rather splendid to her. Although she'd had much the best of the educational advantages, and had been made much of generally by her father and mother, as being the youngest and last in the home nest, still, poverty had always been only just round the corner: they had always had to think twice before spending a penny. But now she was out in the world, on her own, with what seemed to her lots of money to play with: delightful money of her own earning, and theatres to go to, and books and clothes to buy. It *is* good in the younger twenties—you feel so proud and independent—to earn money and have it to spend.

And then, when she'd been schoolmarming for about two years, one Christmas holidays it was, about the middle of January just before term began again, Mr. Fane was given notice to leave by his firm. Why, it was a bombshell! He was only a little over sixty, and he'd been with that one firm now for just forty years. The idea of being dismissed—actually *dismissed*—had never occurred to him. It was that forty years that was the trouble. Of course, he didn't realise it, but he had been getting a bit weak and uncertain the

last year or two : very liable to chills which were bad enough to mean stopping in bed for a day ; and what was perhaps worse, he couldn't depend on his memory the way he used to. The nearest he got to admitting anything himself was, if they teased him about being slow in the uptake over some little family joke or other, he'd say, " Ah, well, I'm not so bright as I was, perhaps." And so, as Greta looked at it, the firm seized on his forty complete years' service with them as the excuse for making him give up. For that was the way they put it. It *was* dismissal really ; but they put it that he owed it to himself now to " retire " and look after his health. After all, business required younger men to do the work. He had served them for forty years now, and they were going to insist on his making this the occasion for crying halt by presenting him with a small token of their esteem for his long and faithful service. All that sort of thing, you know : it's surprising how wonderfully handsome a downright mean action will inspire people to talk.

And they gave him £50 and a gold watch. . . . Of course (Mr. Fane said, trying to cover it up), they'd think he'd saved much more than he had done during those forty years . . . naturally, perhaps. Why, they might not even know that he'd had a family to bring up. He confessed that that had made it difficult, and that he hadn't, perhaps, saved all that he ought to have done. . . .

Greta began to understand—specially after she'd had a talk or two with her mother. Of

course, she'd never before presumed to probe into her parents' affairs. She knew nothing—nothing at all, really, except, in a general way, that things were difficult one way and another, but mainly through trying to give them all a good start in life.

Now, by making inquiries and by receiving confidences—all which, you know, in a funny kind of way, brought her gradually, but very quickly, into the position of being looked up to by her father and mother and depended upon by them, instead of her looking up to them and having them to depend on, as she had done all her life up till now: by this, you know, she found just how matters stood with them financially. And yet it could have been told all in one breath. They had nothing. Simply nothing. Mrs. Fane even imagined that they would lose the whole of the insurance, through not being able to go on with the payments; but, to Greta's unspeakable relief, Mr. Fane knew vaguely that he could "surrender" it at its present value—though the idea of doing so was one which the minds of both of them were almost incapable of contemplating. But Greta, who was learning about all these things hand over fist, insisted that they must get the money now, and wanted to make them buy an annuity with it. So they surrendered the policy, receiving round about £500 for it. But on the question of the annuity they were very firm—obstinate, rather. Nothing that she could urge would move them. They both pointed out, almost tearfully, that they might die almost any time, and then all that money

would be lost. And on the other hand, there it was to leave to the children. "Even—even," said Greta's mother, "if you children have to help us just a little now, we shan't feel it so badly if we've got the money to leave to you, when we're gone. Think how useful it would come in for poor Fanny in all her difficulties. I've always felt it so much, not being able to give her anything of her own to fall back on . . . only just that seven pounds in the Post Office, you know, when she was married."

Greta might have felt, don't you think, in these circumstances that the help she was called on to give now was really being given, it seemed, in order that Fanny might benefit in the future.

Well, she wrote to both her brothers. She hated writing to Charlie, because she knew that he was poor himself; although he was doing reasonably well now, he had handicapped himself with a wife, and there was a baby expected. A draughtsman's salary is modest enough, and of course he needed to save every penny he could, in case of bad health or being out of a berth at any time. This anxiety is always worse for what they call the shirt-and-collar brigade. And so, in writing to him and explaining matters (it was, of course, quite impossible for him to come and talk it over), she thought she ought to say straight away what she was going to do herself, and to make it as much as possible. She said she would contribute a hundred a year. She thought she could do that all right, by being very, very careful. In the holidays, of course, she

would live with her father and mother, except when she could get pupils or a holiday post of some sort. She would try for that now. . . .

Charlie wrote very nicely. He said he hated to let everything rest on her shoulders like that, but he told her what he was getting, and what it was costing him to live; and this being so he hoped she would understand that ten bob a week was really the outside that he could manage—unless, of course, he got another rise, or a better job somewhere. He'd give up his 'baccy, he said. Greta did understand and agree that this would be doing as much as ever he could.

But she hoped for better luck with Jack, wages being high in Australia and he not having any encumbrances. Mightn't he even see his way later on to having their father and mother out there, when he had made a home for them? She told him too what she was going to do herself, and that with the interest on the insurance money and with Charlie's contribution there would be about a hundred and fifty a year for Mr. and Mrs. Fane. She felt she could count on her dear old Jack.

Jack's reply, when it came, half-way through the following term at school, was disappointing, but very sensible. It must, she felt, have been a very hard letter for him to write—it would have been so much easier not to have kept his head (Jack being the kind of boy he was), to have thrown discretion to the winds, and promised a contribution of, perhaps, £50 a year. What he said was that, strange as she'd think it, he'd really been

saving *hard* to be able to buy a farm of his own and stock it, and things were just beginning to go all right—he looked like being able to pull it off soon enough now, what with Government credit and all. As soon as *that* happened—as soon as he'd got the absolutely necessary minimum amount of working capital in the bank to start him (and it was hopeless doing anything without that)—he'd be all right: he'd have an *income*, and could make a decent contribution out of that, or offer her and them a home, or any mortal thing. Only, if he had to come down with a contribution now, it'd mean putting off "till God knows when" doing anything really "bonza" (as he called it: a contraction from "bonanza," perhaps, culled from the Australian mines), even if it didn't bowl him out altogether. And so, as it seemed to him that the parents *could* just about rub along on a hundred and fifty, if Greta would confirm that, and confirm her ability to go on really putting up a hundred a year herself for a bit, he couldn't help thinking it best for all of them for him to concentrate on the future, in the hope of being able to take the whole burden on his back in a year or two's time. Greta was to let him know if she agreed with him about this. And meanwhile, "to help on a bit at the moment," he enclosed ten pounds.

So now Greta had to take up her burden. There was no more fun for her—no more theatres and books and clothes and holidays of quite a superior sort to all sorts of jolly places. She had always rather indulged herself in the matter of dress,

and had prided herself on her taste too. In each of the two schools she had been in, the girls had marked her with a specially approving eye, she knew, for the clothes she wore: she had been easily the best-dressed mistress. She felt, you know, that she hadn't much in the way of good looks; and, this being so, it behoved her the more to have good style.

As for holidays, what specially hit her now was that she had not yet been abroad. She had let herself be mentally influenced—unconsciously, of course; but she was conscious now that it had been so—by the appeal of a railway company to "see her own country first": not that she had ever really believed that there was so great a similarity between Cornwall and Italy: one wasn't a geography mistress for nothing. She had wanted passionately to go abroad. Partly, perhaps, she had put it off because you could only go abroad for the first time once, and a tit-bit of life like that was a thing to be dangled and looked at and made the most of in advance.

And now, of course, it was all over. She had to settle down to being a dowd. She hadn't quite realised, at the time when she fixed her contribution at the fine round figure of a hundred pounds, just how much of a dowd this would mean her being. *That* part of the change, as a matter of fact, wasn't nearly the worst at first—not, in fact, for quite a good time—indeed, it didn't get really bad until . . . until after her love affair, you know—for she was so splendidly set up with things

from her first two years of affluence. No: the worst of it was the sudden descent into meanness: the giving up of tea-parties, outings, amusements, subscriptions, presents and things: all the things that one likes so much to do, and that make people like you—no one can help it: we're all made like that—even if you do happen to be rather plain. That was hateful, especially to anyone who wasn't mean by nature, and Greta wasn't that. That was what made you a dowd and—and unattractive and unpopular. Money is a hateful thing, isn't it? The tricks it plays with you . . . the way it has you so utterly under its thumb—moulds you and warps you. Of course, I'm making the change seem much too abrupt; not so much the change in Greta's circumstances, because that *was* quite horribly abrupt, but their effect on her, the way people began to regard her, and her own outlook, and . . . well, yes, the stealing away of her youth and happiness. And yet, after all, people began very soon to regard her differently, because of the way she had, so suddenly, to begin pulling in and scraping in every direction. You see, providing that hundred pounds really *was* a job—it was every bit as much as she could manage: it left her *awfully* little to try and live on.

During the very next summer holidays she had a vacation post. Or rather, it was a sort of *au pair* arrangement. Nothing else had offered, and it did at any rate save the expense of her food at home. The parents of a day-girl in her form—a rather backward girl, who had been rather fond of her—had made the suggestion: no regular lessons

(that was with a view, of course, to not having to pay her), but just come on a *visit*, going away with them to the sea *en famille* and giving Millicent her companionship.

Well, there it was: Millicent and her father and mother and their two sons. And then, just for the August Bank Holiday week-end, a friend of one of the sons came down to join them. He lived in the town where the school was too. The others, who were good, solid, well-off, dull sort of people, admired him immensely and made a great deal of him, though obviously he was quite poor. It appeared that he was more or less starting life as sub-editor of the county paper; but you could see he was the sort that wouldn't stop there. He was eager and brilliant: very dogmatic (in that dull, admiring family) and sure of himself; but with it all, such a boy—such a charming and enthusiastic boy. . . .

Greta fell in love with him at once. That was easy enough, and not at all surprising. The surprising thing was that *he* fell in love with her. How terrible (she felt at the time) it would have been if he hadn't! There's a time—I've heard married people agree that it's the most wonderful time of all—that comes before the time when they say (in Shakespeare's words):

> Then happy I, that love and am belov'd,
> Where I may not remove nor be removed.

It's the time only just before, they say—when each one, the man and the woman, adoring the other like nothing else on earth, is just beginning

to dare believe that the other is beginning to regard him or her in the same way. . . . There's a sort of aching deliciousness. . . . Oh yes: even then, I think, for there's still the anxiety and endeavour, and, however right everything is going to be very soon, perhaps, the pain hasn't gone out of the desire yet. I remember a line in an old Surrey folk-song (I think it was): "Oh, love is such a killing thing, did you never feel the pain?" After all, if we're to believe what the Buddhists and all those Eastern people say, all desire is pain. . . .

The thought that dizzied like wine in Greta's head was that she might see him again—easily—since, in term time, they were both living in the same town. (At that time she was living in rooms.) The female, no less than the male, I believe, can contrive that there shall be encounters, though she may be adept enough to conceal her own side of the wooing. She must, you know, she must. Anyway, they met—freely enough before the end of the holidays, while she was still acting as companion to Millicent; with more circumspection after term began. He lived with his mother in a very tiny, shabby little house. He asked her to come and be introduced to his mother: they made a tea invitation of it. Well, there couldn't be much doubt after *that*!

During that next term she almost forgot her desperate newly acquired poverty; for, you see, *he* was poor and shabby in his clothes too: compared with him, she was still quite smart, and she could see his eye resting with satisfaction on her

get-up often enough. Plain good taste was what appealed to him.

The first really long spell of not seeing him at all was the month of the following Christmas holidays, which she spent at home. It was funny being at home now: she felt, through the way that her father and mother both regarded her, like the head of the household. Just in a year there had come to be quite that difference, that she seemed to come home to them now not so much like a daughter to her parents as like a parent to her children. She never mentioned him to them—nor indeed to anyone. She couldn't, and yet she longed to be able to.

But, quite early in the next term—the very next time but one that he saw her, in fact—he asked her to marry him, and they became engaged, and then Heaven really did walk on earth (as Shakespeare says in *Twelfth Night*).

Of course, there was no thought of their getting married for quite a long time. He said that himself. He said, "Was it fair of him to ask her, when his prospects were probably rather remote?" And she said she was glad he had, because, as long as they were sure of each other, as they were now, what did it matter how long they had to wait? He said it wouldn't be any longer than he could help: just wait till he found an opening. . . . And it was then that Greta realised that . . . how shall I put it? . . . that she was anxious—or might have to be anxious—rather that he should *not* find an opening too soon than that he should.

For, you see, it made her suddenly remember how she was placed. She wrote home, with a brimming heart, to tell about him to somebody for the first time—to describe him to Mr. and Mrs. Fane; and it was in the act of writing that she thought, "If I tell them I'm engaged . . . won't it make them worry? When I'm married, I shan't be able to go on giving them that hundred pounds. *They're* bound to think of that too." And so, whether silly or not, she suddenly tore the letter up and decided not to tell them at all about her engagement, for fear of making things uneasy for them. And she did want to tell about him too.

Of course, the period of the engagement being so vague, she didn't look things in the face at all—not then. She couldn't imagine that there was any need to be anxious. *He* was so poor, and she was so radiantly happy as she was, that not only was she content to live just in the present, but it seemed necessary to do so. And after all, long before they were able to think about getting married, Jack would be taking her father and mother off her hands.

Well, things went on like that for the best part of a year. The only thing that troubled her at all was that she couldn't be saving, as she'd have liked to, for *him*—quite apart from beginning to get things together for her bottom drawer and her trousseau. After all, though middle-class girls in this country aren't expected to put up a definite *dot* to get married, as they have to abroad, something of the same feeling survives in them—the way an appendix survives in the body: they like

to come not empty-handed, to bring their man something besides themselves. There's a sort of proud humility in it, an expression of "*I* may not be worth the having; but anyway *this* is real solid value." Greta wished she could do that; but, of course, she couldn't. If she could have saved that hundred pounds a year for him, and they were engaged three, four, or even five years . . . fancy coming to him with five hundred pounds of her very own to give him! . . .

And then—suddenly—he got that quite good job in London, on one of the big papers. "Three hundred a year and chances," was the way he put it. He was going up right away—this was in term time: it would be strange to be separated then, and then near each other in the holidays: and oh, quite the wrong way about! What a pang it gave her. She realised then how lucky they'd been so far. . . . And then he was saying that as soon as he'd found a home for her and his mother, they could get married; and before she knew what she was saying she had blurted out,

"Oh no! Not yet!"

"Not yet?" he said. "What d'you mean? We shall have enough to live on now—for a start."

Of course, she said she didn't mean that: it was only the way it had come on her—so suddenly. But he wasn't quite satisfied, she could see. It was part of his character to have awkward intuitions. It often led him to read more in your mind than was ever there—"a journalistic habit," he used to admit. And now he'd got it into his head

that she wasn't as eager to be married, now that it came to the point, as she ought to be, and as he was.

Anyway, they had to say good-bye till the holidays, by when he'd know, he said, how things were going—whether he was "making good," he meant—and then they could talk the whole thing out.

"And of course," he said, just at parting, "you'll be able to introduce me to your father and mother then."

Her father and mother!—who didn't even know about him at all—who would lose a hundred pounds a year out of their total income of a hundred and fifty, if she had to marry him now! Now she *was* in a panic. The rest of that term was an agony. What was she going to do?

Right or wrong, she couldn't tell him how she was placed. That was the first thing she ruled out as impossible. He'd probably try to insist that *he* must provide that money now . . . or, instead of marrying her now as he wanted to, he'd find himself bound to agree to put it off till he had enough to keep her parents too. Oh yes, it was quite impossible to tell him—quite apart from any pride. As for her keeping on schoolmarming, she knew he'd never allow that: besides, that too would probably be quite impossible. But her father and mother had got to be kept. Well, then, what did that mean? Just one thing or another: either they'd got to put off being married, now, when they really could (that was what made the pang, with him wanting her so much too at the earliest possible

moment !) ; or else that money had got to be found some other way. There was only one practical outcome of all this : she wrote to her brother Jack and told him everything. " Would it, did he think, be possible for him to take over her responsibilities now ? "

The worst of it was, she had to meet him and have her talk with him before she could get a reply from Jack. And there was that difficulty of introducing him to Mr. and Mrs. Fane too. She decided to take no risks. She wouldn't cause her parents any worry till she knew for certain that things were going to be all right. And when she was pressed again about the time of the wedding, all she could do was to pretend to want a little while to reflect—just to settle on the best time. It wasn't exactly shilly-shallying ; but of course it had that effect on his mind. It was bound to. He couldn't help but see—so quick and sensitive to impressions as he was—that she was putting him off and beating about the bush. It made things difficult between them—for the first time. . . .

But she hung on till Jack's letter arrived . . . and with that she knew the worst—or so she thought. Jack wrote that it would be fatal to him if he had to do what she suggested at that moment. It was rather rotten luck, he agreed ; but, after all, they'd only been engaged a year, and her *fiancé* would have to wait a bit. Of course, he would right enough, if she told him : that was what she ought to have done—explain it to him straight. Naturally, if he knew nothing, he

couldn't see any reason why they shouldn't be married. Jack hoped he'd be into his farm fairly soon now, if he stuck to it the way he was going. If he wanted to be married himself just then, he'd have to put it off till he felt that he was all right. . . .

It was rather a funny thing: Greta suddenly remembered, as she read Jack's letter, how once, when they were children, he had borrowed her tuppence pocket-money and never paid her back. She'd lost the recollection of that for years. It must have suddenly come back to her through his letter giving her just the same sort of feeling.

Anyway, there was only the one thing to be done now. She must tell him quite openly that she wanted their engagement to continue. She must put it that she felt he ought to be in a stronger position himself first—or say that her parents didn't want her to marry yet awhile. (That didn't matter; she was afraid he'd have to meet them now.) She wouldn't tell him why. Nothing could be done about it. She almost felt that, even if she could contemplate cutting her father and mother down to a hundred a year all told, and even if he could afford to provide the fifty which would have to come from her, still, it wouldn't be right that he should. She couldn't bring that on him. He had his own mother to keep as it was. Silly middle-class pride, perhaps. Anyway, there it was.

Well . . . it was sitting on a seat in Hyde Park that she told him that—that she wanted their engagement to go on, indefinitely. That was

a dreadful meeting between them. It was the first of so many miserable ones that, like a great chill black cloud coming up all over the sky in the middle of the day, wiped out all the warmth and loveliness of the morning.

You see, when she really said that outright—about wanting their engagement to go on, indefinitely—he was furious. It was just what he'd been expecting—or so it seemed. He said she'd been playing with him ; and, of course, it looked like that. And then, in his furiousness, he was going stalking off, and so she had to cry out and stop him. . . . Yes : there were a few people about—going home from work in the damp and dusk—but she couldn't help herself : he was going right off and leaving her, so she had to cry out and stop him. She couldn't help it. And then, out it had to come : the whole truth. She couldn't help it then : she couldn't bear that he should think she was playing with him and didn't want him.

But it didn't make things any better, really—not just after the first minute or two when he was praising her for what she'd been trying to do. After that, he began trying to persuade her to take this or that way out, when, you know, there was no way out at all.

At one time he would say that *he* would keep Mr. and Mrs. Fane now ; but she couldn't—she couldn't possibly consent to that. And then he found out about Jack, and he got the idea in his head that Jack could have done his share if he'd liked. (She never actually showed him Jack's last letter—the one which said that her fiancé would

have to wait a bit. And so, by just telling him about it, she always felt that she might perhaps have given him an unfair impression of Jack, and that rather hurt her too.) About her keeping on as a schoolmarm he wouldn't hear a word. That was *his* pride. And, of course, as I've said, the strong probability was that she wouldn't be allowed to.

Well, they drifted through the holidays like that . . . striving with each other . . . wretched. And she wouldn't take him to see her father and mother, and he knew why, and it made him angrier.

Sometimes in his letters during the next term he tried to keep clear of the subject. But it was no good. He wouldn't settle down to just waiting. He couldn't, she knew. He was getting on : he wanted his way : he wanted *her*, but, if it couldn't be her, it would have to be someone else. She felt that. There was only one faint hope, that before he drifted quite away from her, Jack would get his farm and come suddenly and magnificently to the rescue, the way a brother would, or—or something else would happen, somehow.

Well . . . nothing else did happen. She lost him, that was all. It was a sort of drifting process, a slackening off : all due to indefiniteness—indefiniteness. But it led at last to some small definite realised moment or other, when she just sent him back his ring . . . and never saw him again. . . . He just let it go at that, you see.

After that, of course, life really was changed for her. There's not much more that need be said.

You see, he had been the only lover she had ever had—she had loved and lost, and she found it much worse than never having loved at all (whatever Lord Tennyson may say). There was never likely to be anyone else. For now, you see, she *was* a dowd, and she didn't care. She was an old maid before her time. The way she had to skimp and save and persuade herself to buy cheap things she would never have bought before had its effect in the long run upon her taste. It does, you know. It's a—a lowering of the standard. Besides, she'd come to find it didn't matter. She didn't really care now. When both Mr. and Mrs. Fane died, during the same winter, six years later, and she had all her own money again, and more too, since she was earning a better salary by then, she never, as the saying is, "made the most of herself," as she used to do. She spent more: but she didn't get the effect. Perhaps she . . . almost deliberately didn't want to, you know. You can wear ugly things, I think, almost as deliberately as those old monks and people used to wear hair shirts. And even if she did go to all sorts of places in the holidays—abroad too, if she liked—there wasn't much in it now: she'd rather have had a home.

I don't think she was what you would call embittered: not—not, at all events—with her father and mother, while they were alive. If one had to sacrifice oneself, the best thing was that it should be for those who had sacrificed themselves to do everything for you, wasn't it?—and who did love you in return, even if you weren't

quite their favourite daughter. Fanny, by the way, had £200 of the insurance money when Mr. and Mrs. Fane died, because she was still the needy one. Greta divided her £100 between Fanny and Charlie: she couldn't bear to have it, somehow. Charlie, with his own £100, was thus nearly square on what he had contributed to his parents' support, and deserved to be, for he'd done all he could. Jack got £100 too. He was quite rich by that time, doing wonderfully well with his farm, and still a bachelor. All the same, he had never invited her to go out and make her home with him. And, if he had, she wouldn't have gone.

With her nervousness, she had gathered speed, as she went on. The further she went into her tale, the more she began to realise, it seemed, that it was becoming inevitably apparent as a piece of personal history—that the disguise, which seemed complete enough at starting, was thinning out in a way never anticipated. If it was so, her nervousness and hurry served certainly to betray her, as a spy would be betrayed more by running than by recognition. And so, by the time she had finished, they infallibly regarded her as Greta Fane, and she felt that they did, and felt that she had done it now and could never look any of them in the face again, as she sat there twisting her clenched fingers through what was indeed a very difficult pause.

Mercifully, when someone at last had to break it, everybody didn't rush in simultaneously to do

so. The Bureaucrat spoke first; but his voice was cool, casual, and unhurried.

"I believe, Miss Pogson, that you *are* a writer, you know," said he. "Also, you've studied the Russians."

(He believed nothing of the sort. His sole wish was to make it appear that he—and therefore conceivably, inferentially, each of them—was unaware of anything subjective in the story, but had a polite objective interest in its structure. Since it was gloomy, it seemed safe to mention the Russians. He hadn't really studied them himself.)

Mrs. Dane-Vereker rose. She didn't want to ignore the subjectivity. But the Bureaucrat had helped her to get quietly off the mark.

"Don't you think we'd better defer the rest till after dinner?" she said. "It's getting a little chilly, and it's time to dress. Shall we make a start, Miss Pogson?"

Miss Pogson got gratefully to her feet.

"Unless you'd like to go first, Dr. Pennock?"

"No, thanks. I'll follow later," said she.

The Lady of Fashion slipped her arm into that of Miss Pogson, and they disappeared into the companion together. The Master Printer glowered after them with a face of almost comical distress. Then he rose to his feet.

"Bloody 'ell!" he remarked, quite without apology. Yet, by that polite audience, the objectionable interjection was counted to him for righteousness.

He fixed a baleful eye upon Judas, brushed past

him, and went across the deck. There, out of sight on the other side of the companion, he leaned against the rail, breathing heavily and gloomily regarding the last glories of the day.

"Human nature is a marvellous thing," murmured Father Anthony.

"Who'd have thought it?" murmured Mr. Peter Brown.

And it was surprising how little fatuous both remarks appeared.

Dr. Pennock (who shared a cabin with Miss Pogson) shook herself together and rose.

"Well," she said, "at whatever risk of causing further offence to Mr. Herrick, I must take a constitutional before I go and dress."

"May I accompany you?" asked Mr. Peter Brown. "Even though," he added, "I now know perfectly well the lines to which you will walk henceforward. . . ."

"What are they?" inquired Scott. "Dr. Pennock walks a good deal more briskly than Spencer, you know."

"I know. She walks—the lady of my delight ——" he bowed towards her and hastened to say in humorous apology, "I simply couldn't help that. She walks to the rhythm of—

> The mixture as before (*pom!*),
> The mixture as before (*pom!*),
> Three—times—daily after meals (*pom, POM!*)"

"Wretch!" quoth Dr. Pennock. And they went off down the deck together.

Turpin and Judas withdrew themselves. The

other four men sat on in sombre meditation. Mr. Buck remained for a little while murmuring a broken medley of sympathetic phrases and savage blasphemies across the perfect quiet of the waters. Then he turned, and went heavily across the deck again, and glowered down upon the group silent there in the gathered dark.

"That brother of 'ers," he said. "Measly young viper! . . . Favourite brother! Farm of his own now in Australia! No wonder I 'ave to pay more for my winter woollen undervests. Blowed if I 'aven't a good mind to take one of these trips to the Land of the Midnight Sun this winter and wring his measly young neck for him! . . . Pluck! . . . 'Eroism! . . . Guts! . . . Oh, cripes! Pore little gurl! 'Ere! I'm going down to dress for dinner."

. . . . .

There was champagne for dinner that night, the "little present from Paris," of the once more exuberant Mr. Buck.

"When embarrassed, imbibe a bottle of bubbly," said he sagely to himself. And the prescription worked, because everyone wanted it to work. By the end of dinner they were what Mr. Buck mentally described as "all very jolly together." With that observation, seizing the occasion, he arose, resplendent with a strangely exotic made-up red satin handkerchief affair protruding coyly from a gaping corner of his wide dress waistcoat. (Long afterwards, Mr. Peter Brown wrote an essay about this. "A most delightfully significant detail of *genre*," he called it, "whether regarded as

a mere conventional emblem typifying the primitive tribal neckerchief, or as a residual, rudimentary survival of the cummerbund.")

"Ladies and gents," said Mr. Buck, "with your kind permission I will say a few words."

He proceeded to say a good few, in the manner of his kind when moved to social rhetoric. Eventually he came to business.

"The ladies 'aving withdrawn," said he, "us men will not be long in following. Not," he continued with stern emphasis, "not for purposes of mere pleasure:

> To toy with—with What's-'er-name in the shade,
> And with the spangles. . . .

No, no, not spangles! Bangles—that was it:

> And with the bangles of Sabrina fair."

He nodded with the forthright affability of the alcoholically humane in the direction of the Poet.

"You see I've been improving myself and the shining hour together," he said. "'Aving a look at your library. Miss Pogson 'ere, she said, 'Try Milton.' Thought at first she was referring to the mosquitoes. . . .

"Well now, as I was saying—*not* for purpose of mere pleasure. We have yet to unmask the villain Judas—and I call your attention to the fact that none of our tales so far 'as been calculated to do so. Well now, never you mind that! I've a nideer, I have. Before you *do* leave us, ladies, let's just fix up the order of going in, and then just tell your tales without bothering—only, let me

come last, and we'll see if *I* can't tickle up Mister Judas."

Judas, it is understood, did not sit at table with them. But Turpin still did. Mr. Buck rolled his exuberant eye to where the latter sat, at the bottom of the table.

" I'll have a word or two first with you, Turps," he said. " All I ask the rest of the company to understand *is* that if my tale's a bit frisky—what I mean is, a bit spicy, a bit 'ot—well, there's a purpose in it—un'nerstand me ?—there's a *purpose* in it—and you won't want to wrap up so much, anyway. Besides which—Lord love you !—the things I've 'eard from some of *you !*—things I wouldn't have said in the private bar of the Roxminster Arms on a Saturday night when the barmaid wasn't listening—and 'er not just what she should be by all accounts !

" Well now, about the order of going in. Let's see : who hasn't told a tale yet ? . . . Right you are : got you ! Now then : *eena, deena, dina, do.* . . ."

Thus it came about that, when the company had reassembled on deck, in touch at once with the cold majesty of the magnificent black night and with the snug materialism of the lighted yacht, Dr. Pennock was prepared to take her appointed place upon the rota and tell

THE FOURTH DAY'S TALE OF THE WOMAN DOCTOR

THE WOMAN DOCTOR'S TALE

A MOTHER'S COMEDY

By MICHAEL SADLEIR

WHEN Doctor Pardoe died three years were yet to run of the twenty-six to which, at his first renting of the old house on the High Street, he had committed himself and his family. It had been something of a venture, that twenty-six years' lease, involving issues graver and less ponderable even than those of physical migration from the spruce villadom of the Malling Park Estate to the reserved dignity of the Old Town. "Leybourne," vividly prominent at the corner of Mallworth Avenue and Station Road, represented to his timid and somewhat volatile ambition an adequate if moderate certainty. "Doctor's Castle," on the other hand—for such, oddly enough, was the local nickname of the old red house—meant a definite increase in yearly expenditure and a dubious increase in practice.

"Old Humphreys is known to them," he had objected, when his wife urged him to enterprise. "He may be past his work and out of date, but

so are they also—for the most part. I shall lose my patients at this end to that quack Stylott, and find none to replace them at the other."

"Darling," she had replied, in her caressing drawl, "you know I never advise you except for your happiness. You are so modest that you give yourself too little credit. Have I not been *begged* to persuade you to the old town? Everyone is *longing* for a real doctor. And then—of course you think I am silly—but the phrase 'Doctor's Castle'! So romantically suitable! Goodwill in itself."

He had smiled, indulgent to her graceful affectation.

"It was a different kind of doctor!" he had ventured.

"Psh——! As if *that* mattered! It is your chance. Alfred, I mean it. *Do* think of yourself just this once!"

He had yielded at the last, his precautionary scruples soothed by the emollience of his wife's forethought. "The stabling!" she would murmur. "All the trouble of hiring will be spared you and you know how Carter and his meanness worries you! It will be much cheaper in the end." Or again: "Poor *dear*! you look so *tired*! Now when you have that long quiet room on the garden, you can work out all your wonderful discoveries and never be disturbed an instant." Or again: "Have those horrid Mertons not paid yet! And they roll in money. At least in the old town we shall deal with gentlefolk and you will be saved *that* kind of anxiety."

So the plunge was taken and Alfred Pardoe struck out towards the patronage of the Retsworth aristocracy, while his wife, clinging with elegance about his neck and encouraging him with sweet flattery, counted the yards that sundered her from the social intimacies she craved.

Perseverance, ceaseless labour and sound knowledge on the doctor's part, aided by the lucky demise of his ancient rival, made of the new life a semblance of success. In ten years he was medical adviser to all the best people, and, more satisfactorily to his wife, admitted on terms of cordiality to their dinner-tables and their amusements. The dog-cart with which he started was replaced by a brougham. This, because Mrs. Pardoe wished it, was later supplemented by a Victoria. Came the age of petrol and the horses were sold, the stables converted, and a motor purchased for professional convenience. The case of the brougham was re-enacted. "It wouldn't be *much* out of your way, darling, to drop me at Mrs. Willoughby's?" Or again: "Those tiresome Stores have not sent the things. As you come back, *could* you get these few oddments at—and—and——?" Or again: "The girls' dancing class is at three and I *don't* like them walking out in this slush. I wonder . . ." When, now and again, he would flash out into the weak temper of the wife-ridden man, his too-violent protests were received with an abasement that disarmed him. "Oh, Alfred, I *am* sorry! You must be worn out. Of course it doesn't matter." And for two days would endure osten-

tatious labour in his intimate service, orgies of shirt-mending, tender inquiries as to health, feverish interest in the details of his work. Partly won over, partly nerve-wracked by the martyred activity of a usually indolent woman, he would himself volunteer his car, his odd moments, even his hard-earned balance, and count the sacrifice well made, if his wife consented to become her feckless self once more. The purchase of a second car, while it wiped out the savings of five years, put a stop at least to the perpetual intrusion of private on professional affairs. And once again, he decided with a mental shrug that worry in the present was well allayed, even at the price of comfort in the future.

All the time there was growing up about him a family of children. Two had been born under the art-tiling of "Leybourne." Three more came to being in the first five years at "Doctor's Castle." The mother spoke of them as yet further proof of her self-sacrifice and devotion to her husband. "He *adores* children," she would say to some female intimate, "and then of course for a doctor's wife it is different, isn't it? He is so clever and it does one's heart good to see his delight in them. I have been very fortunate. Yes—the easiest time, with every one. But of course I am an old woman now—with my little brood!" And she would receive, with deprecating protest, compliments to her willowy and youthful figure and to the spiritual transparency of her skin. Truth to tell, she let the gift of birth do service not only for its splendid self, but also for those

less spectacular, more wearisome duties that usually devolve on the mother of small children. The little Pardoes were left to nurses and servants and to the indulgence of their father's few hours of leisure. Of their mother they saw little enough, save after drawing-room tea when, in clean frocks, they were set to posture before visitors to the greater glory of maternal vanity, or on those more numerous occasions when their needs or desires, serving to justify some additional luxury, pandered to their mother's love of spending. Such an upbringing threw on to temperament the whole responsibility of forming character. The child that was naturally orderly came to orderly maturity; the rowdy grew to rowdiness; the equable and the bad-tempered respectively to good-natured unselfishness and to cross-grained complaining.

The years passed; the doctor toiled ever more ceaselessly; until, when his eldest child was twenty-six and his youngest eighteen, he took influenza from a patient, developed bronchial pneumonia and in a week was dead. He was not an old man; his health had always been good. Mrs. Pardoe felt the calamity as another woman would have felt sudden brutality. After all she had done for him, to die like that, leaving her and her children forlorn and unprotected! Matters became doubly serious with investigation of his affairs. Of late years, weary of struggling to keep expenditure within the limits of good economics, he had let things slide. The bank manager was an old friend and had delayed, from kindness and from personal embarrassment, the needed warning.

His good intention was, by his client's unexpected death, transformed into cruelty; to the widow, confident in a safe if moderate inheritance, he could reveal only debt.

Mrs. Pardoe supported the blow in her own way. To the bank manager she said very little. Only this in fact: "I am sure my husband spent on himself what he considered necessary to his work; to his wife and children he was just rather than generous. But I cannot complain. It was my fault for being content with ignorance of his affairs." To her brother she wrote rather differently: "You have always girded at Alfred, and I have always stood up for him as a wife should. When you learn how he has left me, you will affect no surprise. 'She married beneath her,' you will say, 'and this thriftlessness is what one would expect from ill-breeding.' You will call it selfish in him not to have considered the risks of his life, exposed as he was to infection of every kind. You will think me ill-used, in return for my devotion and care of his comfort, thus to be widowed and penniless. Alas, I cannot prevent your thoughts nor, if I could, would their prevention benefit me. I am too stunned, as yet, to plan for the future, but at least I have my children. *They* will see that I do not want. . . ." And more in the same strain. Finally, to those children themselves assembled in family council, she spoke as follows:

". . . You see, therefore, my darlings, that we must help one another. We shall come through—never fear. My family have always come through

in the past, and I am sure you will not now be unworthy of your forbears. Your poor father was not a business man. He had great talents, but they were not of the kind to make money or to keep it. I blame myself for leaving in his hands work that he was too busy and not by temperament fitted to perform. However, it is useless to cry over spilt milk. Let us count our advantages rather than our burdens. For myself, I want little. This house and garden, my friends, a crust to eat—that is all *I* ask. *You* have your lives before you. Fortunately your education is complete. The time has come to turn to good account what I and your father have done to fit you for the world. Dear Alfred has already made a start——"

Alfred, the eldest, fidgeted with his collar. For the last two years, after the completion of his technical training, he had helped his father in and about Retsworth. A clever boy would so far have profited from such skilful and loving tutelage as, in a crisis of this kind, to assume instantly the headship of the family and dispose, as it deserved, of his mother's disingenuous rhetoric. But Alfred was not clever. He distrusted his mother, but he distrusted himself still more. Faced with the task of solitary practice he fumbled and was afraid. Desperately striving to conceal his nervous diffidence—for he felt his seniority a little heavily and longed to resent his mother's assumption of authority—he achieved only an awkward sulkiness. Now, as often before, he felt baffled in his desire for self-assertion by the impalpable dishonesty of Mrs. Pardoe's method of attack. Her reference

to education struck him as particularly unscrupulous. Were he for himself to claim a due of tutelage, he would in some sort abandon his customary assumption of maturity. On the other hand, he knew that money, were it forthcoming, might help his own start in independent doctoring to a degree incalculable, and that to press the needs of his brothers on the straitened resources of the family would be tantamount to resigning any pretension of his own. So he fidgeted with his collar and sought lumberingly for a line of argument.

"——And for Alfred's sake," continued Mrs. Pardoe, "I am anxious to live on in this house for the remainder of the lease. Alfred will profit—do not fiddle at your collar, Alfred dear; you only tear the stud-hole; Dorothea tells me that several were badly frayed when they came home from the wash last week—Alfred, I was saying, will profit from the fact that folks regard this as the doctor's house. They will give him a trial if only for his father's sake—a trial," she added graciously, "that I am sure he will amply justify." There was a pause, while Mrs. Pardoe relished in silence her children's subjugation. Then she proceeded: "In the second place, this has been my home—and yours—for many years, and your dear father would wish me to stay here among my friends. There is a third reason, which Molly will appreciate without my explaining it. I am glad to spare her the discomfort of attempting to do so."

Again the speaker paused, glancing from one to another of her hearers with a sombre glitter in her

large, indolent eyes that might betoken either expectancy or spitefulness. Molly, twenty-two and emphatically feminine, tossed her fair curls and pouted at the sunset. A flaming sky lit her cheeks fierily, and she courted its reflected glow, conscious that her high colour was not all of heaven but hopeful, by laying the blame for it on the sinking sun, to acquit her own embarrassment.

Molly was the social success of the family. Her brothers were undistinguished in looks and manners, her only sister seemed ten rather than two years her senior. Aware of her own superior graces, she had grown into calm acceptance of her greater share of life's pleasant gaieties. She hunted and golfed and danced where her brothers dared not, and her sister might not follow. Her father's patients included many of the neighbouring county families, but to their wide and comfortable houses the doctor's children were, with one exception, only formally welcome. "Molly is such a dear," they would say. "A real sport, that younger Pardoe girl," they would say. And so she was invited here and there, but the others not, a state of affairs productive of much possible friction. Her popularity had, however, begun too early, had been too clearly evident in comparison with the awkward civility shown to her brothers and to her sister, to disturb the family harmony in serious degree. Her home fellows, no less than her acquaintances, accepted Molly as the best-looking and the easiest mannered of the younger generation at Doctor's Castle. Without protest they left to her pre-eminence in the social

arts, comforting themselves with their very modest prowess in other spheres of activity. Now and again was murmuring—if Molly's homecoming at 3 a.m. from the Hunt Ball caused noisy farewells under the bedroom windows of the less favoured ; if hospitable aunts in London invited Molly, and again Molly only, for a week of dissipation ; if, in the matter of new clothes and thanks to the arduous smartness of her existence, Molly had twice or thrice the number that were fairly hers. But such grumbling was half-hearted at worst, and, in the face of Mrs. Pardoe's strong support of the fortunate culprit, did not seriously affect the contentment of the household. Any bitterness was further sweetened by the genial temper of Molly herself. She was a placid and affectionate little person, whose pink cheeks, dimples and softly vigorous movements were a true expression of temperament. She could slough off one environment when entering another, as easily as she could slip from her frilled dressing-gown into a warm bath. Never once, in the adequate but controlled comfort of home, did memories of lavish entertainment at the houses of her wealthy friends come to jar her equable good humour. Dorothea, whom the pleasures of religion compensated less fully than she would readily have admitted for physical insignificance, sought now and again to pique her sister into derogation of the family way of life. " What a mess Hugh makes of the bathroom ! " she said one day. " His old loofah always on the soap tray, his shaving things scattered about everywhere,

Boys are disgusting ! I wish we had two or three bathrooms like the Molyneux."

" Where would you put them ? " asked Molly placidly.

Dorothea sniffed. It is irritating to be challenged on a practical issue, when presenting a theoretical grievance.

" I suppose I must go and see about the vegetables," she went on. " Graves might really bring them up to the house every day. Mrs. Wyndham told me she never goes into the kitchen-garden at all, except to see how the peaches are getting on. Nothing works automatically here ! "

" Poor Thea ! I'll go, if you are busy."

" Of course not ! *I* haven't got a lot of invitations to answer or finery to stitch at ! You won't have those nightgowns finished for Tuesday if you aren't careful, and you must do us justice in front of Aunt Louisa's maids."

And she bustled gloomily away.

The limpid pools of Molly's mind remained unruffled by this and similar conversations. She was often sorry for Thea, who hated domestic duties and, after early communion, was cross for the rest of the day. Probably, other things being equal, she would prefer her own bathroom (as at the Molyneux) to a hurried few minutes among her brothers' shaving tackle ; probably also the Wyndham method of fruit and vegetable catering would be her method could she choose between it and that in force at Doctor's Castle. But comparisons of the kind were foreign to her mentality. She was always subject to the dominant influence

of the moment. This was home, with the ways and the food and the worn carpets proper to its familiar spaces; Tarr Court and Ladelea Manor were things other, with ways proper (no doubt) to themselves. And there she left it.

Lately, indeed, thoughts of change, but of another kind, had begun secretly to trespass on her contentment. For their secrecy she treasured them, deliberately blind to the true meaning of their recurrence and of her involuntary welcome to them. Two years of social frivolity had taught her the language of flirtation, but not even the alphabet of love. Men, attracted by her cuddlesome prettiness, by the appeal of her ready laughter, by her energy on the links, the tennis court or the river, had flocked about her since first she emerged from flapperdom. They carried her clubs and her wraps, bought her chocolates and flowers, slung shady hammocks for her Sunday afternoons, competed for vacant spaces on her dance cards. The uncritical habit that made her at once a pleasant daughter and sister and a delightful guest, followed her into the lists of gallantry. To each man of the dozen who were assiduous in her service she was confiding and friendly, deaf to their hints of rivalry, as happily satisfied with every circumstance of the moment, as she had been with those of yesterday, as she would be with those of to-morrow.

At home she was chaffed freely about her admirers. "Jack Hinton came past this morning," Hugh would say gravely. "Poor fellow! So pale he looked. He had a flower in his button-

hole. A camelia. Molly wore camelias last night at the ball. I waved a handkerchief from the landing window. That cheered him up."

Or on another occasion :

"Peter was nearly drowned yesterday. He flung himself into the river, and two people in a punt were so engrossed in their own affairs that they never even shifted the sunshade to see who was in need of help."

Molly giggled.

"Don't be silly, Hugh. I wasn't on the river yesterday!"

"Never said you were, duckie!" retorted her brother gleefully. "The cap seems to fit all the same."

"Well, what became of Peter? Did he drown?"

Hugh shook his head.

"No. But he might have done, if he hadn't been able to swim. He was bathing, you see."

Mrs. Pardoe took no part in tormenting her daughter, but she kept a very close eye on the progress of Molly's friendships. Doctor Pardoe, in the year before his death, would protest that she overdid her maternal watchfulness.

"Leave the girl alone, my dear!" he would say. "There's no harm in her, and when something real comes along, you won't be able to control matters any the better for past interference."

Mrs. Pardoe refused to argue the point. Her husband mistook her motives, but she knew that they were good and meant to act upon them.

"Molly is very young," she would reply, "and it is our duty to guard her innocence. Besides,

my children are my hobby. They are my world. You have your own great, clever interests; I am a mother first and last and all the time. Still, as you wish it, I will be doubly careful. The darling child shall notice nothing."

It was six months before her father's last illness that Molly met Ernest Gower. He came to Tarr Court for a week after Goodwood, and Molly was a guest in the house. Almost at once, with a possessive severity strangely different from the affectionate politeness of her other cavaliers, he sought her company. He was over six feet in height, full complexioned and bull-necked. The first afternoon, on the tennis courts, she noticed his great forearms and wrists, downy with soft dark hair. They played on opposite sides and one of his strong, low drives hit her on the knee, so that she stumbled and lay on the court. He was over the net in a moment and kneeling beside her.

"Have I hurt you?" he inquired. "Please forgive me! I am a careless brute."

She looked up at his face, and the scowl of anxiety seemed to lend piercing force to his bright grey eyes. For an instant her self-command wavered, but she pulled herself together and gave him one of her ready smiles.

"I'm perfectly all right, thank you. It took me by surprise." She prepared to scramble to her feet.

Without a word he put his huge hands under her arms and picked her up like a child. Till she fell asleep that night she could feel the grip of his fingers on her shoulder-blades.

By the end of the week it was clear to the Molyneux house-party that Ernest Gower was interested in Molly Pardoe.

"He's fearfully rich, darling," Ada Molyneux said suddenly, as she sat in Molly's bedroom for their nightly gossip.

"Who is?" asked the guest innocently.

"*Who* is!" mimicked Ada. "Hark at her! Why, your great bear Gower, you silly! Fearfully rich; and never loved anything but horses before."

"What nonsense you talk, Ada. Let him go back to his old horses for all I care!"

"Hoity-toity! We have betrayed ourselves a little. Darling Molly, don't be cross with me! I should like you to marry someone really fine; not one of the nambies round here. And Gower really is a man, isn't he?"

Molly laughed.

"I can only presume so," she said. "He certainly looks like one. Anyway, I don't suppose I shall see him again, so that's that."

"No, it isn't, Miss Clever! Far from it! He has bought Warrenders and will be living five miles away in three months' time."

"Warrenders? The racing stable?"

Ada nodded.

"And the big house. He went and signed it all up yesterday. Quick work at the end. I wonder why?"

She hummed an aggravating tune.

Molly set her lips demurely.

"I hope he'll like his new house," she said at

last. "It's a dreary great barrack of a place to look at."

"It only wants a mistress to put it in order," replied the other. "Good night, dear."

Mrs. Pardoe heard all about Ernest Gower and the new house the day that Molly got home. From whom she derived the information no one knew, and she said no word on the matter to her daughter, but in her own efficient way she made investigations as to the newcomer's parentage and resources. These completed, she settled down to watch developments.

Her husband's illness and death, while it naturally upset the lives of all his children, only served to deepen the interest of the widow in the prospects of her second daughter. She told herself that on Molly alone now depended the family salvation. Molly at least was her mother's child. The others, she told herself, took after their father's family. They were ordinary; they were undistinguished; all except Molly. But even Molly, once she lost her looks, would go the way of a million unnoticed women. Mrs. Pardoe had despaired of Dorothea since, pimply and fifteen, she had forced an embarrassed but fanatical young curate to hear confession. Gradually the mother came to realise that the boys also were hopeless. Alfred, callow and gauche as a medical student, had returned to Retsworth a drab and silent young man, lacking in his mother's opinion all the graces of a successful practitioner. He was industrious and presumably knowledgeable enough,

but for a touch of magnetism Mrs. Pardoe would gladly have seen her son shorn of half his learning.

For the shortcomings of Hugh, her second son and her fourth child, she laid blame everywhere but (as she should have done) upon herself. At the age of eighteen he had gone as pupil to the estate offices of the Duke of Windlesham, whose agent was an old friend of Doctor Pardoe. He had always been fond of the open air, and the doctor was grateful for so good an opening to a knowledge of land-agency, an occupation seemingly well suited to Hugh's natural tastes. He was a noisy, empty-headed, good-natured youth, a little addicted to horseplay, but without guile and eminently teachable. Windlesham Castle being but fifteen miles from Retsworth, he bicycled home for Sundays, returning to his work by the same means on Monday morning. The week-ends passed by, and Mrs. Pardoe, for ever too eagerly on the watch in the interests of deportment, taught herself to believe that Hugh was deteriorating. She told her husband that the boy was in bad company and should be spoken to. Doctor Pardoe, harassed by money cares and stupid with over-work, was disinclined to judicial tolerance. He accepted her story and rated Hugh for sins of which he was innocent. Mrs. Pardoe met him on the mat, as he emerged, partly astonished, partly hurt, from his father's study, and treated him—to use a family phrase—to one of her "symphonies in the key of Grieve." This was the last straw. He lunged out into clumsy argument. His mother tightened her lips and watched

him coldly. He floundered to silence and stood sulkily perplexed.

"This pains me more than you, Hugh," she said at last. "I can only hope that God will set your feet into new and better paths."

That, after such treatment, he should seek distraction just where he had been falsely accused of finding it, was not surprising. Both at Windlesham and at Retsworth were to be found flash ne'er-do-weels of the type indigenous in towns adjoining well-known racecourses. Hugh went to no extremes. Indeed, for all but the veriest fraction of his time, he remained the heedless, explosive lout he had always been. It was, nevertheless, due to the missing fraction that he could not, now that he was twenty, total up to the standard required by Molly's fashionable friends. But for those odd hours in the wrong company, his high spirits and love of games would have rendered him grateful if unexacting company to the young bloods of the county. But there had crept into his high spirits a note of commonness; into his love of games a touch, at once sharp and sour, of professional sport. The county shivered and left him alone. Mrs. Pardoe, touched in a tender spot, accepted the defeat, but her heart became sombre toward her recreant son.

If neither from Alfred nor from Hugh could be expected worldly achievement, the prospects of Kenneth, though for no discreditable reason, were equally mediocre. Eighteen only at his father's death, he had been vowed to the Navy, since as a small boy he first went to Osborne.

The Navy, even to cadets as fond of their life and as rich in friends as was young Kenneth Pardoe, holds out no hope of early affluence nor indeed (unless from the happy hazard of a war) of great rapidity on the road to glory.

Alfred a drudge; Dorothea, a fiddle-faced church-haunter; Hugh, a bar-lounger; Kenneth, a penniless naval cadet—so, in summary, ran the embittered thoughts of an ambitious mother when, during the dark hours after her husband's death, she plotted how best to master the future. Molly remained; Molly with her pretty face and graceful ways, her smart friends and her modest, adaptable nature; Molly—to be near whom Ernest Gower had taken Warrenders and come to live at Retsworth. With a grim relief, she determined that Molly should marry Gower and that on his shoulders should be laid the task of making soft his mother-in-law's declining years.

Wherefore it came about that, as her chief reason for staying on at any price in the old house in Retsworth High Street, the mother set before her children one of their own love affairs. The action was carefully calculated. Among their intimates the possible pairing of Ernest Gower and Molly Pardoe had been half-humorously, half-seriously canvassed; but beyond this nothing was known, because in fact nothing had occurred. The mother had begun to wonder whether Molly were any more closely touched by this latest admirer than by those who had preceded him. Suppose she were incapable of deep feeling?

Suppose (worse still) she had no sense of what was practical? Suppose she let her youth and her beauty dribble away in fatuous river or ball-room gallantries? The idea was too terrible to be borne. References direct and oblique made in private to Molly by her mother could elicit neither blush nor frown. She smiled placidly and even joked over Gower and his rumoured devotion. "How you fuss, mumsie darling! Surely the poor man can have a racing stable if he likes?" "But he is always making meetings with you, is he not?" Molly shook her head, gazing at her mother with innocent round eyes. "How should I know? I see him sometimes, but whether he fixed it. . . . Really, to hear you, I might be Circe or a Siren or something!"

At last, and determined to put her belief to what might prove a final test, Mrs. Pardoe had decided on the mention in full family conclave of Molly's supposed lover. What happened has been told. Dorothea saw the blush behind the reflected sunset; so did Mrs. Pardoe. That was enough. The former told an ill-favoured but devout friend who, in the intervals of prayer, told other friends. Mrs. Pardoe whispered over the Vicarage tea-table the next afternoon that she "supposed they must lose their dear Molly once she was out of mourning for her poor father." And so in three days Retsworth—or as much of it as counted—knew, in varying degree of certainty, that Molly Pardoe was engaged to Ernest Gower.

On the fourth day Molly met some girls she knew outside the Post Office.

"You sly thing!" cried one of them. "Fancy never telling a soul! *Do* ask me to be a bridesmaid! I think he's *awfully* handsome."

"So do I!" gurgled another. "I'm dead with jealousy of you, you lucky girl."

Molly allowed herself for one short moment to wonder what they meant. Then (as on a hundred earlier occasions) her customary readiness to accept the immediate present came to her rescue. Evidently she was engaged to be married. These girls had virtually said so. It could only be to Ernest Gower. She could not remember his proposing to her nor her reply, but having no illusions as to her memory and being, in fact, wholly under the spell of his masterful personality, she took that preliminary conversation for granted, smiled mistily at her girl-adorers, murmured vague thanks and went her way.

At the Club House on the links Gower met young Molyneux, with one of the Duke's grandsons and several other men. Molyneux drew him aside.

"Gratters, old man!" he said. "I didn't know you'd gone all the way."

"What the hell do you mean?" demanded Gower.

"Come off it!" cried the delighted youth. "Damn good! What do I mean? Ha! Ha! Damn —er—jolly damn good, what?"

"Stop cackling like a lunatic and explain yourself. I understand you felicitate me on something. On what? I ask for information merely!"

Molyneux, sobered by his friend's sarcastic violence, gazed at him vacantly.

"Why—er—little Molly!" he stammered. "Engaged to her—all over the shop."

Gower gave him a sharp glance and turned away.

"Oh—thanks!" he said curtly. "I didn't understand at first. Thanks awfully. It surprised me so many people knew."

Turning on his heel, he strode away, cranked up his car and drove furiously and alone into the heart of the country.

II

Molly's marriage to Ernest Gower promised to fulfil every expectation of the bride's ingenious mother. Tradesmen, aware of the prosperity of the son-in-law, were lavish with credit. Mrs. Pardoe, anxious to make hay before the clouds returned, sold out a portion of her very modest capital, and used the proceeds to give an impression of newly discovered and illimitable resources. The overdraft was paid off; Doctor's Castle was redecorated; even the "society" motor-car was sold and substituted by one of a later pattern. Alfred's professional needs, on the other hand, were thought to be amply met by his father's original two-seater. "We must not be extravagant, darling," she said. "After all, I owe that much to the bread-winner!" The way of the adventurous widow was further made smooth by the personal subjugation of her new son-in-law. Gower, like most men of athletic habit and heedless courage, was a puppet in the hands of a clever

woman. He loved Molly for her rosy prettiness and the submissive wistfulness that was really lack of character. He fell a victim to his mother-in-law, because she treated him with that semi-gracious, semi-confiding intimacy that middle-aged but elegant women find so telling with men younger than themselves. One of their earliest interviews claimed him as her slave. She lay on her drawing-room sofa, the suave lines of her flowing dress emphasising the dreamy refinement of her face. Ever since she was a young girl and had overheard a foolish friend of her mother's liken her to Cophetua's beggar maid, she had moved and dressed as befitted a Burne-Jones beauty. Now, in her mature age, the task became even simpler, because the type immortalised by that famous painter is really a type of maturity with the lines washed out and lends itself better to reproduction in terms of the languor of womanhood than in those of the taut energy of girlishness.

She gave him her slim white hand.

"And I have to welcome you," she smiled, "though you come to rob me! Stand a moment. Let me look at you. . . ." Then, slightly but not too deeply under her breath, she murmured: "A man indeed!"

Gower coloured and stood in the embarrassment for which she had schemed. To right and left she waved a graceful surrender.

"You strong men come and carry off our girls, leaving mothers to weep. But you love Molly and she loves you, and therefore she laughs for joy of you and you for joy of her. So I must laugh

with you." Her voice became suddenly intimate in its practicality. "Now sit down and tell me about your house and where the honeymoon will be, and whether I can do my little share in getting things ready for your return."

By degrees she led him to talk of settlements, of furnishing, even of linen and the like. Hypnotised, he undertook this and that, imploring her to act on his behalf as purchaser, promising to foot such bills as might accumulate in the fitting preparation of a home for the girl whose heart was his. When he left her Mrs. Pardoe lay back with a sigh of happiness. Behind closed lids she saw visions of lama blankets, of delicious sheets and pillow cases, of beautiful clothes, of Eastern rugs and frail, exquisite porcelain. She mistrusted her judgment of quantity. Maybe, to be on the safe side, she would order a little in excess of actual requirements. Ernest would hate meanness. Besides, what was not immediately needed could remain at Doctor's Castle. She would be willing to house it for the young people; quite willing—in the circumstances.

And so Molly married and went honeymooning with her man; and her mother, financially carefree, stocked and furnished the bride's home and, incidentally, her own home also.

But as time passed, the shelter of the Gower cheque-book threatened to recede from over the head of the household in the High Street. Now that Molly and Ernest were on the spot it was harder to use them as guarantee. Things, moreover, were getting bad again. Alfred's

practice could not be said to be shrinking visibly, but he had undeniably less press of work than had his father in his latter days.

"You are early," Mrs. Pardoe would say. "Your dear father never got in before a quarter past. But then we others are the gainers. I am glad your work is manageable. Your poor father was perpetually overdone."

Alfred longed to retort that his father was a slow worker, and that where twenty minutes were once required ten only nowadays sufficed. But he dared not. He knew that his mother, when it suited her, treated the memory of her husband with oblique but petulant ridicule. On the other hand, when equally it was convenient, she spoke of him as a doctor in ten thousand. Were he to venture forth on the side of criticism, she would range herself instantly in passionate defence of the dead. He feared his mother, with her smoothly cruel tongue, and therefore, greatly though he longed to excuse his apparent idleness, he dared not.

"No one is ill," he would rejoin awkwardly jocose. "Retsworth is becoming a health resort. Perhaps when the weather breaks. . . ."

But he knew that he reasoned falsely and his mother knew that he knew. So they played out their farce of mutual deception—she silkily depreciatory, he evasive and falling daily more deeply into discouragement.

With the third and fourth half-yearly accounting of the new régime the truth might no longer be concealed. Patients had fallen away, were falling away in increasing numbers. Alfred, struggling

with his own faint-heartedness, succumbed wholly before his mother's insolent sarcasm. His head on his arms, he let her anger pass over his misery and beyond it. To Hugh he poured out his troubles. The younger brother offered clumsy comfort, but was as little fitted to right parental injustice as was its immediate victim.

"Let's get away from this hole," he suggested.

"Get away!" cried Alfred bitterly. "How can we? She would refuse. And at least I make a little money here. Elsewhere even the governor's reputation would be lost to us, and I shall never do anything on my own. I am too stupid and—people do not like me."

"Rot, old man! Abso-bally-lutely! You used to be tophole. It's only the mater and her tantrums that put you off your stroke. Let's get away and leave her behind!"

This audacious proposal staggered the elder brother.

"What'll we live on?" he asked.

Hugh became confidential.

"Well, I know a fellah—got a turf commission business—and he said . . . and I said . . . and we both agreed . . . thousands, old dear, thousands. . . ."

The recital jerked from slang to profanity and back again to slang. Alfred listened in bewilderment to as unsavoury and speculative a programme of existence as ever offered itself to a victim of failure and despair. At last he promised to consider matters.

"Sounds a bit steep to me," he said. "But I

can't stand this life much longer. I'll think it over."

Meanwhile Mrs. Pardoe was in pursuit of her own interests.

"You are writing to Harrods, darling?" she would say during one of her long and frequent calls at the house of her married daughter. "Would you ask them to send me some things also? I quite forgot to write yesterday. Everything could come out together and perhaps the car could drop mine at home when you come past next. Give me a note of what I owe you."

For a while this method worked well enough, until Molly, now as closely identified with her husband and his well-being as ever she was previously with that of her own family, made objection to the rising debt.

"I wish you would pay me, mumsie. It's over fifty pounds now, and it makes my house accounts all wrong."

"Sweet child, forgive me! I am such a careless old woman. I'll send it you this very evening. By the way, *will* you settle with Celeste for me when you post your cheque to-night? Then I can put it on what I am sending you and save two stamps! If you'd do it now, I'd post it in Retsworth for you."

But neither the household debt nor the money paid to Celeste nor any other of the outstanding obligations due to Molly made their promised appearance. Two days went by without a word of explanation. The young wife felt irritated and ill at ease. Her husband was carelessly

generous in the matter of money, but he liked a monthly statement of account and this, unless her mother paid some part of the sums owing, Molly was unable honestly to prepare. "I'll tell Ernie to-night!" she decided. "This very evening. It can't trail on like this." In the fervour of her determination she began a sudden investigation into past expenditure. Turning over old receipts she chanced on those for monies spent at the time of her wedding. The totals appalled her. Closer examination immediately showed what had occurred. She was at first horrified at what she took to be her own carelessness. The next moment the true implication of this waste of her husband's money struck her like a whip. She flamed to fury against her mother and in that moment of anger she saw a thousand incidents of the past in the fierce light of a new and pitiless understanding. For a moment her confiding inexperience blinked in the glare of the terrible revelation. For a moment she could not realise in full detail this dazzling exposure of her mother's dishonesty. But incredulity and bewilderment alike gave way to full and disgusted comprehension. In an instant she was all condemnation. Every action and motive of her mother, from before her father's death to this last and meanest subterfuge, repelled and sickened her. Then something of Gower came to strengthen her, and it was with tears in her heart, but dry-eyed and firm in loyalty to the husband whose good nature had, as she now realised, been wickedly abused, that she sat down to write to her mother a letter that might

well mark the end of the closest intimacy humanity can know. It was a terrible task—the writing of this letter. To bring accusation against anyone were hard enough to one of Molly's affectionate and trusting nature; to accuse and to reproach her own mother was wellnigh impossible. But the thought of her husband gave her strength. Word by word she fought down her instinctive hatred of the things she was determined to do. At last the letter was finished. Closing it down, she went to her room and flung herself on the bed. Ernest must know everything that night. She felt exhausted and apprehensive. Perhaps if she could sleep a little. . . . He would be home in an hour and a half. She would lie down till he came. . . .

But when Ernest Gower came home he was beyond such trivial worries as those that made miserable his pretty and loving wife. They brought his body back, all twisted and shattered as it was, and laid it on a bed with a sheet drawn over his handsome face. Once too often had he put horsemanship to the test. The legend that no horse existed too wild for Gower to master had gone the way of many legends, for now he was dead, and his back and two of his fine limbs were broken, but the horse that killed him was not dead, nor would its evil spirit yield, save to the bullet that on the morrow would end perforce its dangerous career.

III

Ernest Gower had been buried six weeks and the young widow, still white and silent under the

shock of her loss, was living on in the house that was now her own. She was under the natural care of her loving mother. Mrs. Pardoe had hastened to Warrenders, when first the news of disaster had reached the town. She had found her daughter prostrate; the house in confusion and lamentation. Without opposition she had assumed command; interviewed lawyers and officials; made funeral arrangements; controlled the fitful energies of a disordered staff. Maternal care and the exigencies of practical duty kept her at Molly's side. Six weeks she had been at Warrenders and each week she had found the house more wholly to her taste. During those weeks she had been unremitting in the service of her daughter. Molly had lain seriously ill for ten days before she took the turn and began to struggle slowly back to health. Now she was downstairs and about again, but listless and dull-eyed, plaintively obedient to those around her, desiring nothing, observing nothing. Mrs. Pardoe announced that they would go abroad, and Molly assented. Mrs. Pardoe thought Hugh had better accompany them. "A man is so useful," she explained, "with all those nasty customs people and frontier tickets." Again, and without comment on her mother's conception of European travel, Molly assented. Finally, Mrs. Pardoe proposed that a circular letter be obtained from Molly's bankers, but in her mother's name, so that the petty finances of the trip could be regulated without constant and troublesome reference to the invalid. Once more Molly assented, but this time across

the sluggish pool of her mind crept a tiny ripple, as though some forgotten memory had stirred beneath its apathy, bringing back a hint of other and less grievous days. The mental movement, slight though it was, showed itself in her eyes. Mrs. Pardoe remarked it and understood its significance. On the night following Gower's death, while hastening from her daughter's sick bed on some errand of nursing care, she had passed into the boudoir of the young mistress of Warrenders. On the bureau was a letter addressed to herself, and Mrs. Pardoe, never unobservant even in moments of anxiety, had put it in her pocket for examination at a more convenient time. Once aware of its contents she awoke to the fortunate coincidence of the tragedy of Ernest Gower. The letter she scrupulously destroyed, and thereafter devoted herself to keeping from the mind of her daughter all memory of its existence. When now she noticed in Molly's indifferent eyes the fleeting gleam of intelligence provoked by a direct reference to money matters, she told herself that, although the task of obliterating all memory of that dreadful letter was still unachieved, it had been well begun. Two or three months abroad might be trusted to complete the work.

Events proved her to be right. When the travellers reached Retsworth once again, Molly was more nearly her old self than seemed at one time possible. She had reverted entirely to the days before her marriage when home and home influences and, in particular, the personality of her mother, ruled her amiable and impressionable

mind. Gower, save as a formula in explanation of the melancholy that now lurked perpetually in the shadows of her brain, might never have existed. His time of domination was over; that of Mrs. Pardoe had entered on its second phase.

Satisfied that her daughter was once again properly susceptible to the power of maternal suggestion, the mother prepared to put matters to a final test. From Warrenders she paid visits to the old house in Retsworth, returning with stories of incompetent and thieving servants, of squalor and quarrels and decay. Hugh, after the foreign tour, had drifted about the town, betting and drinking. The agent's office, that formerly occupied at least some part of his time, was now a thing of the past. He refused to return to it, and his mother, intent on her own scheming, saw little gain in forcing him to submit. Alfred, in his mother's absence, had really tried to make up some of the ground previously lost in the campaign for sickroom patronage. But he sank back to his old, sullen timidity as soon as she was once more on the spot, first lashing him with the torment of her irony, and then irritating, with contemptuous flattery, the wounds she had already laid open. Dorothea, in everything but garb and place of residence, was now vowed wholly to the service of her Maker. That she was prevented by the hated claims of domesticity from actual taking of the veil made her sour-tempered and querulous. She greeted Mrs. Pardoe with savage resentment.

"I have slaved here for a year," she said, "and it is now your turn. If you can quiet the trades-

men and keep the place tidy and buy Hugh whisky and give Alfred his meals on nothing a week, you are welcome to the triumph. I'm done with it."

Mrs. Pardoe saw at once that in this embittered woman she had a potential ally. She answered softly, made elaborate inquiries into church-topics and progress, sympathised tenderly with her daughter's troubles during recent months.

"You have saved your sister's life, darling," she concluded, "and He will remember it. Now the time of your reward is coming."

And so, ultimately, the stage was set for the final tableau. It represented the boudoir at Warrenders, the very boudoir in which had lain the letter, designed to sever a daughter from her mother. Mrs. Pardoe lay on the sofa; Molly Gower sat on a low chair by her side.

"Yes," the mother was saying. "I must leave you now. Those poor dears in the High Street need my help. They have a hard life, for things are not what they were. I am so deeply thankful that you at least are comfortably provided for. Perhaps we may see you from time to time. It has been lovely for me to have you to myself again for so long; quite like old times when you were a tiny girl and I would take you away after some illness to lodgings by the sea. But then—" (she smiled with wry bravery and her voice trembled)—"then we used to come home together, for it was one home in those days—not two——"

"Mumsie dearest," interrupted Molly, carried

happily into a sea of sentiment by her mother's affecting words, "once and for all I beg you not to leave me! Give up that old house and come here—all of you. I cannot live here alone. I've told you often and often how I want you to come. You shall do things just as you like and it shall be more your house than mine. *Please*, darling mumsie. . . ."

She wound her arms round her mother's neck. For a while nothing was said. The two women clung together—the cheek of the elder resting on her daughter's hair. For Mrs. Pardoe it was a supreme moment. Three times already she had refused this suggestion, feeling uncertain of the permanent sincerity that had prompted it. Now there was no doubt. Now at last victory was really hers.

"Dear, loving, generous child," she said softly. "You have conquered me. I cannot let you be lonely. Perhaps also my experience may save you troubles and disappointments. So be it, then. For us Doctor's Castle is over. Dorothea shall go into the convent she longs for. Alfred shall give up his work, poor boy. Hugh shall look after the horses and the estate. This shall be our home—mine and yours and your dear brothers.'"

And once more the two heads rested tenderly side by side. The silence of the luxurious room was broken only and with sibilant gentleness by Molly's sobbing. She was crying for happiness. . . .

Mr. Peter Brown laughed.

"Well done, Dr. Pennock," he said. "That's no wash-drawing. It's an etching—done with acid. Was she a patient of yours?"

"I hazard myself the suggestion that you were the confidante of Hugh," said Henry Scott.

Dr. Pennock smiled with prim-pursed lips to this felicitative wooing, but made no reply.

"Now then," cried the Master Printer to the Bureaucrat, rolling a cigar luxuriously in his mouth, "'ere we are safely back again among the Upper Ten—and a nice lot they are by the accounts we're getting of them. Still, they make good 'earing—it's what I like, I don't deny it—and you're the man to give us more of them."

Already mellowed by Mr. Buck's really good wine, the dignity and disdain of even Vivian Spencer were not altogether proof against this.

"Well, you know, really I, I—er . . ." he began. And there this already mellowed dignity and disdain broke down finally into the artistic itch of a man who felt that, if it came to a matter of good set terms, he could a tale unfold as well as any of them. And so he began:

THE FOURTH DAY'S TALE OF THE BUREAUCRAT

THE BUREAUCRAT'S TALE

MONOTONY

By STORM JAMESON

THE great dining-room was like a forest with a pool of light in the centre. The recessed and shadowy walls were the forest and the table was the pool of light. A crystal candelabra lifted fifty candles that shook in the draught, and fifty reflected gleams shook and twinkled back from the polished walnut and the glass and silver dishes. Two wide stone hearths were filled with blazing logs—half trees piled there and stacked up with small branches and twigs. It was impossible to stand close to them or look directly at them : they threw off a frightful heat. Yet the two people sitting at the table shivered : the man growled and the woman complained thinly of the bitter cold.

The man spoke without turning his head.

"Grigori."

"Excellency?" A darker shadow detached itself from the shadows of the wall.

"Build up the fire. God dammit, Matty, I can't stand these Russian winters any longer."

The Russian woman said indifferently: "You were glad enough to get here one winter, my good Tho-mas."

The man hunched down in his chair.

"Would you like to go back to your kind, pleasant England? No doubt you are still longed for. There is the door. There are no horses in the stables and no carriage, and you are a hundred English miles from a railway. Why not walk?"

Unexpectedly the man smiled and spoke gently.

"Don't bother to talk, my dear. I'm bored to death and so are you: we're old and stiff and stupid, but we needn't be bigger fools than God made us."

The woman did not rise to the occasion; it was not one of her occasions. It demanded an understanding of brotherly respect which the old withered princess—in common with almost all women—did not possess. She looked at her English husband, who had grown old without withering, and resented him bitterly and viciously. But she held her tongue, having just bitten it so sharply that it was bleeding.

It was the day of Epiphany. Ten years ago she had eaten a Twelfth Night dinner in London. The guests were few, but perfect of their kind, as the Russian woman noted with satisfaction. She felt very secure and happy that night. She had been luckier even than she had expected: there were no doors that would not open to her now. She had risked everything and won: how few women dared risk everything: most of them kept

some little link with safety, some thin rope that tied them to a mediocre success. Only the elect cast off all ropes and sailed out on to the high seas. She lifted her small sleek head and smiled.

"Why are you smiling, my child?"

The child, who was forty that day, and looked a youthful twenty-five, smiled again with ingenuous pleasure.

Other guests came in after dinner: an ambassador and his wife, an old Frenchwoman who was rarely seen in other peoples' houses—the princess was afraid of her—a middle-aged Scot who eyed her with curiosity, and two Englishmen. Thomas Pocock Selle came straight to her. She welcomed him frankly. He was more than personable, tall, lean, fair, and marked by life. His hostess of the night called him—"Poor darling Thomas," and that—the Russian woman had discovered—always meant a darling who had the right parents, the wrong income, and a way with him. His luck had always held: he always got the women he wanted: when he played he always won, and he had come through South African and frontier war without a scratch.

"Matty," he said softly, "did you know I was coming?"

"No."

"I came for you. Do you know that you're adorable?"

The princess smiled joyously. "So are you."

He put his fair head on one side. "Are you really a princess, adorable Matushka?"

She nodded. "Yes, really. But not so real

a one as they think." Her glance travelled down the long, narrow room.

"Shall I tell you when I first began to fall under your spell?" he murmured.

She made a swift childish grimace, and deliberately exaggerated the un-English quality of her speech, because she knew that it fascinated him a little, just a little.

"Shall I tell you when I first began to fall under yours, Tho-mas?"

"I have none."

She leaned towards him. "You seem to be managing very well without one, dear Tho-mas."

He met her glance, and the princess was amazed to find herself struggling with an incomprehensible emotion. She could not speak or look away. She sat and looked at him, and he looked at her. An endless time that was only a minute passed, and then the Frenchwoman's soft, hoarse voice spoke in her ear, and she turned round, with her hand to her throat, to meet the curious stare of two old gleaming eyes. Selle stood up, bent over the Frenchwoman's hand, and drifted across the room.

"Poor Selle. He is ruined."

The lisping voice startled her. "Poor Selle?"

"He is ruined," the old woman repeated impassively. "In a few days he goes. No one can find money enough for him this time. They will give him a dinner and shake him by the hand and say—'Good-bye, my dear. See you in Cairo.' But they will not see him in Cairo and they know it, and they would be surprised and angry if they

did. He is too old now. He is forty-five. I think he goes to India, perhaps. Where do your nice ruined men go? To Siberia, hey? To Paris?" The cackle of laughter broke off abruptly. "There is a Little Russia in Paris. You know it?"

"No, madame."

A thin stiff finger on her wrist. "You will. You will."

Selle went. He went within the week. But he did not go to India and there was no dinner given. His luck broke at last. Young Laidler—very young Laidler—made a scene over a card table in a club, and Thomas Pocock Selle, hardly able to believe that at the last moment his luck and his skill had failed him, walked out of the club and across the Green Park, hatless and overcoatless in a snow-storm. The porter stood on the step with hat and coat in his hand and stared: he knew most things but he did not know why Mr. Selle had forgotten his coat, and what was very strange and altogether out of his experience, he never found out.

Thomas Selle went straight to his adorable Matushka. He took her hands and kissed them and laughed and said,

"I've come to say good-bye, Matty."

"You are going."

"This afternoon."

"To—to India."

He threw up his head and laughed outrageously. "Good gad no—why ever should I go to India, you funny little thing?"

"Madame du Plessis said——"

"Th' old hag. You'll never see me again, Matty."

He kissed her lightly, lifting her off her feet, so that she felt very ridiculous but not at all annoyed. Then he set her down.

"Good-bye, my dear."

He was at the door.

"Tho-mas."

"What's the matter? I'm doing it very well, ain't I? Dammit, what's the woman want?"

"Tho-mas. Where are you going?"

He cocked his head at her again and smiled. She felt dreadfully afraid. A man of forty-five never looked like that—boyish and mischievous and smiling inside himself—unless he were on the point of doing something quite horribly idiotic and unreasonable.

"Tho-mas."

Her voice startled herself, and startled him. She caught sight of her face in the glass. It was the face of a forty-year-old woman, lined and desperate. She did not care.

"Tho-mas."

"What is it, my dear? Why, Matty, Matty. God, I didn't mean it like this. Dear Matty. Darling. Don't cry."

"I'm not crying." She spoke quite calmly, holding him with both hands. "You're going to kill yourself."

He stood looking down at her for a long time.

"How old are you, Matty?"

"Forty."

He sighed.

"Well, you're old enough to have sense, though I'm damned if I ever met a woman so old that she had. Listen, m'dear."

He told her, and she listened, and at last laughed.

"Is that all?" she said. "Is that all?"

He stared at her. "All?"

"I thought there must be a woman."

He looked at her in uncomprehending dismay.

"A woman? Haven't you been listening to what I've told you?"

"Of course. Are you *sure* that's all?"

Thomas Selle sat back in his chair.

"Women simply aren't human," he said at last.

He saw her face and smiled ruefully. "I don't mean that, darlin'."

The princess did not care what he meant. She began to talk, to coax, to entreat. And in the end, because he was forty-five and a little tired and more than a little careless, he agreed. They left England together for her small estate in South Russia.

Ten years. The wide inhuman countryside dwarfed and crushed them. They were fifty and fifty-five and looked it. They had no neighbours, no horses, no money, nothing but some few scattered descendants of serfs who paid tribute in kind, and a small forest that they were burning to keep themselves warm. It would last their time, and no doubt the cellar would last too, since it had been well stocked by an ancestor who had the wit to be a fat old Austrian with a purse as comfortable as his jolly paunch. Fire to warm their

bodies and wine to warm their souls. There was nothing else to be anxious about.

They were bored. They slept and played cards: the princess stared at her face, long since ravaged past pretence, and hated her husband: the Englishman stared into space, saw the Green Park and the lovely hill of St. James's Street, and hated Russia and all things Russian with a slow and devouring hatred.

To-night was like ten years of nights. Then did not look at each other across the table. They ate and drank almost in silence. When the may spoke his abrupt voice startled the woman from a vague dream.

"Matty, that cursed forest is getting on my nerves."

The princess twitched her mouth. "We're cutting it down as fast as we can."

"I could have sworn there was something in it to-day."

A flicker of interest showed in her eyes.

"Yes, Tho-mas?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. It's probably only this damn country. It positively smells of death."

"And does my forest?"

"Well, if you want to know, it does."

The princess laughed. "You are not often so imaginative, my Tho-mas."

Silence shut down on them again. Suddenly Thomas Selle leaned back in his chair, beckoned the watching shadow, and gave an order. The shadow slipped away.

"What did you say, Tho-mas?" The shrill voice was sharp.

Thomas smiled. "We are going to drink the second bottle to-night, Matty."

"No, no, it's not time, it's not time."

"It never would be time for you, my lass. You'd keep it and keep it—and maybe drink it at my funeral."

"It's mine," she said sullenly.

But he only smiled at her, and she fell to muttering and picking with her fingers at her dress and the folds of skin round her neck.

The servant returned. His huge body in its worn livery threw a curved shadow on the wall: his arm, bent over the princess' glass, was like a scythe. His face, with jutting cheek-bones and flat yellow skin dragged across them, recalled grotesque Teutonic visions of Death. He hung over the princess and poured out the precious Imperial Tokay with hands that were careful from habit and not from reverence. There had been three bottles. One they had drunk on the night of their arrival, when body and soul were numbed and oppressed by the bleak winter spaces behind them and the iron circle of sky round them. This was the second.

Thomas Selle lifted his glass and looked at its amber depths. It reflected gleaming lights like a great tawny jewel. He took a few drops on his tongue, and let them trickle slowly down his throat. He had drunk so much in ten years that he was afraid. If it were to taste like any commoner's drink! If his palate had forgotten

how to savour! He drank again, and knew ecstasy.

The princess sipped slowly, with little greedy movements of her lips. Her thin throat worked.

"It's a little like quince and a little like gooseberry," she said, "and delicate—like wine in a dream."

A candle spilled hot grease on Selle's outflung hand. He did not feel it, and the hand holding the glass never shook. The princess saw it and leaned forward.

"Your hand, Tho-mas," she said softly.

He looked at her, not understanding. Then set down his glass and smiled.

"Matty. One can't both live and have lived. Dear Matty."

"We've lived," the old woman murmured.

They began to talk in low voices that fell now and then into strange soft laughter, issuing from lips that had almost forgotten such laughter, falling on ears that would have been startled had they heard it. They recalled men and women whose names, once familiar, woke a little shock of wonder and joy—like a happy meeting in strange lands. The room filled with ghosts. Old wine was drunk, old jests re-told, old triumphs burned in their blood, old loves—made soft and gentle by time—came out of the dead years to comfort them.

Thomas Selle sat back in his chair: his hands pressed into the grinning wooden devils on its arms. He was a boy standing stripped beside a pool: the cold clear water parted to receive his smooth body:

he dived, rose, and floated: he looked at the burning blue of the sky and the blue haze of distant hills: water weeds twined round his legs and the branches of a willow trailed past his face: he was happy beyond sense or speech. . . . He was a very young man with a handful of other young men, lying behind a mound of parched earth watching the approach of certain dark figures that were men: the figures advanced, scattered, ran: he fired: a figure stopped, wheeled round, fell with arms flung out, moved once and lay still: he was sure that his face did not change with the knowledge that seemed to run like a thin fire through his veins: he had killed his man: he, young Thomas Pocock Selle, had killed a man for the first time.

Thomas Selle moved in his chair. He was in London and the lights were lit down Piccadilly, and across the bronzed shadows of the Green Park more lights came out: no one noticed the modest stars: who cares for stars when Piccadilly has her lights.

The princess folded her hands in her lap. "What are you thinking of, my Tho-mas?"

"Why, of London, Matty, and men I knew."

She nodded her head. "You have forgotten the women, Tho-mas. I, I have not forgotten my men."

"I am here with you."

"It was an accident, Tho-mas. You had rather a thousand times have died there ten years ago. At home, Tho-mas."

Selle called: "Grigori."

There was no answer.

"Grigori has gone," the princess said, peering into the shadows.

"What the devil——"

She soothed him. "Perhaps he is sick. He will be hungry."

Selle looked at her. "Is there any need for him to feed himself in the middle of my dinner?"

"Perhaps there is no food for him," she suggested blandly. "Yesterday there was none."

"Now what in thunder d'ye mean, my dear?"

She smiled reassuringly into his puzzled face. "There is enough for us. But in the village there is very little. Last week they threatened Grigori when he took what is due to us. The children's stomachs are swelling and the old ones die."

"Good God, Matty, are you telling me you——"

She interrupted him patiently. "Is it my fault the rye was spoiled? Must we starve too?"

Selle frowned in his effort to find words she would understand. "Why is there nothing for Grigori?" he demanded suddenly.

"He has his week's food," the princess murmured. "He must have eaten it too quickly."

Selle relaxed moodily. No use talking to Matty. He would look into the thing to-morrow. Even Russians could not be let starve to death under his nose.

"Well, why the hell doesn't Grigori come back? He can eat what's left."

"He can not, Tho-mas."

The man smiled unkindly. "Oh yes he can,

my dear. And we'll have the last bottle up. We might as well drink it."

"Not now," she pleaded. "Let us save it just a little longer."

"We'll drink it," he repeated.

He rose stiffly, pushing back the heavy chair with a force that sent it over the flagged floor, strode to the archway and tugged back the hangings.

"Grigori."

His voice came back to them from stone corridors and crannied roofs.

"Tho-mas. Sit down."

He turned at the thin entreating sound, and came slowly back. They sat in silence, while the ghosts that had come from the quick past slipped away and were gone, without a backward glance for the two who had less of life than they.

"Nothing happens," said the princess.

"Nothing ever will happen, m'dear."

"It's very dull, Tho-mas."

"Damned dull."

The wind shook the flames of the candles and stirred the hangings. It sounded in the trees of the forest like a murmur of voices. Like voices and a trample of feet.

Selle stared at the shuttered window opposite his chair. A light crossed the narrow crack between the shutters, and another and another. A murmur of voices rose and swelled and shattered into loud single cries.

"Grigori?"

The princess was on her feet, her eyes on the dishevelled death in the doorway.

"What is it?"

Thomas Selle said quietly: "Well, Grigori?"

The man drew his fingers from a welling hole below his chin.

"Excellency——"

He spluttered, choked, and fell.

The princess tugged at the shutters.

"Leave them alone, Matty." He snatched her back as a shutter crashed in and a bulky head protruding through the rent was followed by bulky shoulders and an arm. Selle grasped the heavy wooden stool at his hand. Matty cried out and he swung round: for one that got in by the window ten were coming in at the door. The room was filling with a strange crowd—peasants in sheepskins and a few women. It was an armed crowd—scythes, weapons like bill-hooks—"Always was afraid of bill-hooks," Selle's mind observed—heavy sticks, a few hatchets. It advanced into the room like a lumbering herd of cattle coming through a narrow gate, and once inside hesitated, surging irresolutely between door and table.

"Now then, men, what d'you want?"

Selle spoke in English without realising it. A tall peasant, swaying on his legs, advanced to the table and touched a glass with one finger. He prodded it, picked it up and looked at it with a rather comic and childish wonder. The remains of food on the table caught his eye: he dropped the glass and stretched out his arm.

"It's a toss-up between pillage and murder," thought Selle. "Perhaps if we feed them——"

His tongue obstinately refused to remember its scanty Russian. "Matty must talk to them."

"Tho-mas."

Selle turned round slowly and with a smile: he saw Matty held fast by an arm that came through the shattered window and shrinking from a grotesque face. Selle lifted the heavy stool, brought it down and had the pleasure of seeing the face become a bloody mask that lolled aside and abruptly disappeared.

"You've done it now," said the mind of Thomas Selle.

A mutter of wrath in the crowd behind him: a haggard monster of a woman shouting incomprehensibly.

"I don't understand a word you say," observed Selle pleasantly. "I've forgotten all my Russian. Odd, isn't it?"

They were all round him now, and he saw without feeling much the descent of a blow that cut open his shoulder.

"Oh! damn your bill-hooks," he murmured.

Mirth overtook him. He laughed aloud. He caught sight of Matty crushed against the wall and felt a pang of apprehension. Then that was gone: he laughed again for joy, and lifting the stool crashed into the human herd. The blood ran down his face, blinded his eyes. He remembered the third bottle of Tokay. "God damn their throats that'll swallow it," said the mind of Thomas Selle, and he struck again, smiling to feel the soft impact of flesh on hard wood. His legs were giving way. Faces in which he simply did not

believe pressed against his. "Bloody Russians," said the mind of Selle. Suddenly he saw a boy's white body parting the cold waters of a pool. The waters closed over him, softly, joyfully. He rose and floated, and looked up at the wide English sky.

The tall peasant lifted the body on his foot. "Dead," he said, and surveyed the torn hangings, the shattered glass and smashed furniture. His eyes fell on the woman huddled by the wall.

"The old one," he observed pleasantly. "I think she would be good for some sport, brothers."

They sported together, therefore, for some time, the old aristocrat and the lusty peasants. Love is a leveller. The princess begged to die.

She did die. The last bottle of Tokay was smashed and ran away into the flooring of the cellars with ignobler wines, and the forest received the body of Thomas Selle: it lay there on the snow, smiling, as if its last ten minutes of life had paid all.

Henry Scott was staring with a rather queer look on his face—a look that the Bureaucrat would have ignored in any manifest inferior. As it was, he paid it the tribute of a return glance of bland, surprised inquiry.

"So that," said Henry Scott softly, but as though it hurt a little, "was the end of Thomas Pocock Selle. . . . Poor fellow! poor fellow! But I wonder how you can possibly know?"

"What!" exclaimed the Bureaucrat. "You knew him?"

"School and 'Varsity," said Henry Scott. "He was senior to me, of course, but—we were pretty intimate till he was sent down. After that —I heard of him, too much perhaps, and encountered him certainly too little. . . ."

The others were silent—thrilled with the coincidence that had given verisimilitude to so really wild and unconvincing a story.

"I'm sorry," murmured Vivian Spencer in apology. "I'd no business to use his real name. I didn't trouble to invent, I'm afraid, because I didn't dream that anyone here would know him or even his name. . . ."

There was no arrogance of tone now, and so the evident arrogance of fact just passed inevident.

"As for my knowing what I've told you," he continued, "there was, if I remember right, some sort of consular report, semi-official. Possibly the servant didn't die on the spot, but was able to give some account. Quite certainly I've made some imaginative embellishments. I apologise. . . ."

He smiled gently as he leaned back and lighted a cigarette.

"Well," said Mr. Peter Brown, "it's my turn now. My own personal reminiscence is, as it happens, also a tragedy—a ghostly one this time, not a detective one. Forgive me if I poach," he added pleasantly to Henry Scott.

"I hope to profit by your doing so," the latter returned, settling himself down to hear:

THE FOURTH DAY'S TALE OF THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND

THE TALE OF THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND

THE WATER SPRITE

By HORACE HORSNELL

I'VE never told this story to anyone. I hardly know why. Never had quite so congenial an audience, I suppose. However. . . . It happened nearly ten years ago. And something about the atmosphere to-night brings it all back to me vividly. I feel I want to tell you about it, from the beginning, as it happened. With my going down to Peverley. That was my first real sight of English country after five years out East. And home. . . . Peverley was my aunt's place in Sussex. A lovely old house. I was brought up there by her when my people died. I'd pictured it all so often while I was away. And everything was just as I'd hoped and known it would be.

My aunt was waiting for me in the garden, as she'd promised to. I dare say I'd reminded her often enough in my letters. But she'd keep a rendezvous like that charmingly and never forget a single detail. We were great pals, always had been.

I arrived about four in the afternoon. We had tea under the cedars. It was as if I'd never been away, plus all the keenness of five years' absence. You know. . . .

I suppose I was so full of it all that I didn't notice at first how different everything was. It looked just the same. And if things hadn't happened there—to me, I mean—I might never have known, until it was too late to understand, how completely all that I really cared for had gone scat. I know that I began by talking a lot about myself and all I meant to do now that I was home again. And she listened and let me talk. Encouraged me to, as she always did. But somehow, whenever I brought her into my schemes—such wonderful schemes!—it was as if she wouldn't let herself link on. I only realised afterwards how quiet and reserved she'd been, how shut in and sad—withholding herself. As if she was worried and afraid. And most of all lest I should see she was afraid. But she must have concealed it pretty well because, as I say, I didn't realise it till later.

We walked round the garden after tea and talked. And among other things she told me for the first time the details of my cousin Aubrey's death. This had happened in tragic circumstances, a month or so after I went abroad. In the summer. And though she had written to me about it at the time, her letters had given little but the bare facts. Aubrey was then a delicate, imaginative boy of about fourteen. Nice enough kid, though I never got much change out of him. But they were

devoted to one another. And his death was a tragedy she couldn't get over.

He'd been found in a pond in the garden early one summer morning. Drowned. Sleep-walking, they said. He used to walk in his sleep. And as she spoke about it, quietly and unemotionally, I only fully realised then all that it meant to her. She was a widow and he was her only child. I felt very keen, now that I was home again, to make her forget that she hadn't a son. She made it easy for me to convey what I felt.

Later on I went upstairs to unpack my traps and change. My old room it was, with everything just as I had left it, all my books and litter in their old places. It had a deep bay window with a wide window-seat overlooking the garden. Such a lovely outlook. The lawn with flower borders, great beech trees at the far end, and high box hedges all round. And in the shadow of the trees a pond with water-lilies and a fountain. This was a marble statue of a water-nymph, an antique, that my uncle had brought back from Italy when he was a young man. It had been there as long as I could remember. I loved it in the old days. It fascinated me and frightened me, too, at times. It was all green and water-worn, and some sort of story they told me about it as a child was the basis of many others I made up myself. It was in this pond that my young cousin had met his death.

Well, I'd stowed my stuff away and had finished dressing, and was sitting at the window, smoking a cigarette, and looking at it all in the golden light. The garden was lovely. Still as a picture and full

of memories. Just the background for the dreams, practical and otherwise, I'd brought back with me. I suppose I must have been thinking about Aubrey and the things my aunt had told me about him. The pond and that statue were so much a part of my own childhood that all kinds of queer reminiscent fancies passed through my mind.

The sound of the dinner gong interrupted my reverie. And just as I was making a move, something—a figure—out there at the end of the garden under the trees caught the tail of my eye. A naked boy. On the grass by the fountain. I recognised him at once. My cousin Aubrey. Not a ghost. At least. . . . I think I'd have known him anyway. Even if he hadn't looked up at me. For he came up the lawn and stopped and looked. As if he knew I was there. Such a look, too! Like a fellow I spotted cheating at cards once gave me. I didn't speak—couldn't, somehow. But I waved my hand. Then he ran back and disappeared among the trees. And though I waited at the window for a time, I didn't see him again. It shook me, I can tell you. It was the last thing. . . . I mean, nothing of that sort had ever happened to me before. And one hasn't a very open mind at twenty-five.

When I went downstairs my aunt noticed at once that something was wrong, though I said nothing about it, nor did she. I couldn't begin to, somehow; though it was there, shouting at the back of everything I thought and said. I shall never forget that evening. Neither of us so much as hinted that anything was unusual. It was as if

we were both afraid to be the first to speak about it. I don't know. . . .

After dinner I got her to play some Mozart. She seemed only too glad not to have to talk. But this secret we shared and never mentioned was there between us all the time. It seems queer to me now that we didn't speak about it. I wish we had. Anyway, soon after ten I made the excuse that I was sleepy after the journey—I knew that she usually turned in early—and went up to my room. Not that I had the least desire to sleep. I wanted to be alone. The curtains had been drawn over my window. I decided to leave them drawn and not look out. But I couldn't read or settle to anything. And after a time I simply had to draw the curtains right back and look out. To know the worst. . . .

There was a full moon. The garden was all silver light and shadows, so quiet and still; the air warm and scented—lovely summer country! I don't know how long I sat there. An hour probably. But just as I was thinking of turning in, I heard someone come out of the house. It was my aunt. She walked slowly down the garden, keeping to the shadow of the tall hedge, till she reached the end of the lawn where the fountain was. I pulled the curtain so that she shouldn't see me there. She walked slowly backwards and forwards for a while under the trees, then went to the fountain and sat down on the stone rim of the pond. She was crying.

Something prevented me from calling out—apart from the fact that I was afraid of startling

her, I mean. And presently I saw something move in the water. Rise out of it. The head and shoulders of that boy, my cousin Aubrey. As I had seen him earlier in the evening. His shoulders glistened in the moonlight and he held out his arms to her, all dripping with weeds and water. She leaned over to him; their hands met, and she helped him to clamber out.

She tried to wrap her cloak about him, but he wouldn't let her, and when she held him he broke away. He seemed to want something of her, to be expecting and demanding it. And she couldn't understand what it was. It was pitiful. As if she wouldn't let herself understand. He would go to her and put his arms about her neck. But each time she tried to clasp him he slipped away. He always evaded her, would run a few steps and then come back to renew those passionate entreaties.

At last she came slowly back to the house and he followed at a distance. And when she came indoors he waited just below my window, timidly, impatiently, as if torn between escaping and waiting for her to come out again. I saw him come up to the house and peer in at the lower windows. And once he threw himself face downwards on the lawn and tore at the grass with his hands.

When she reappeared he ran up to her and snatched at something she held in her hand and danced away with it. It was small and slender, like a necklace. And as he ran down the garden he kept throwing it in the air and catching it and laughing. And when he reached the

fountain he slipped back into the water and disappeared.

I watched all this in a kind of spell, hardly knowing whether I was dreaming or awake. But when I heard my aunt come in and go to her room, I crept downstairs out of the quiet house into the garden. I had to get outside. These strange happenings impressed me as having been enacted before. As if, whatever they were and whatever they meant, they were part of a familiar ritual. Something about my aunt's behaviour, even the way she cried, conveyed that idea and kept me from intervening.

Once out-of-doors I became calm, even dispassionate. I got away from the house and lawn, and wandered for a while in remote parts of the garden. It was like being in a strange but lovely country that I had visited before only in dreams. For although I knew every turn in it, every bush almost, the moonlight and my imagination invested everything with a dreamlike unreality.

At last I approached the end of the lawn where the fountain was, drawn there by an irresistible fascination. And from the shadow of the trees I gazed at the figure of the water-nymph. Her head and shoulders were bathed in moonlight, but the rest of her and the pond were now in shadow. When I went closer, it seemed as if she smiled in response to my wonder and concern. As if she knew but would not reveal to me the secret of it all. She was very beautiful in that silver half-light. The gracious droop of her head, the sidelong glance of her wide eyes and her sly, remote smile were familiar to me as of old.

At her feet a swan, all water-worn and stained with ooze, reached up its head to the little stream that trickled from a slender-necked vase and quietly plashed among the reeds that hid her pedestal. This gentle obbligato intensified the silence of the summer night, and sweet scents from the garden perfumed the still air.

I sat down on a wooden seat that encircled one of the old trees, lost in a kind of waking dream. From where I sat I could see the house, in one window of which a shaded light still glowed. And as I sat there, absorbed by the wonders of this strange, eventful homecoming, I felt that I was no longer alone.

No longer alone, did I say? What a feeble expression of my feelings at that moment! It was as if an urgent alarm had been sounded, some quick, subtle clamour that dispersed my fantasies. Had someone called me, spoken my name, whispered passionate menace in my ear as I sat dreaming in that fragrant solitude? I don't know. But fear, instinctive and acute, swept over me like icy water. And as I sustained it, the sudden hooting of an owl, far out in the dark blue air, brought me to my feet. The things I had seen from my window were no longer incredible and half-effaced memories. I mean they were not outside me now, but close at hand, personal and intimidating. They challenged me. The shadows all about me seemed alive. You know the tricks imagination will play with darkness and silence. But this was different, though there was nothing palpable to give substance to my fears. The gentle

trickle of the fountain and the quiet whispering of the trees were the only sounds I heard.

Slowly this wave of instinctive terror ebbed. Yet, behind the familiar beauty of this pastoral nocturne, a nightmare quality lingered. The darkness itself seemed to impinge upon me with eyes that watched me as my cousin Aubrey had done when I first glimpsed him in the dusk. And other eyes, too, with sly, sidelong glances, like that of the lovely nymph herself, whose statue, so close at hand, hid its face from the moon.

So much for fantasy—as you, no doubt, conceive all this to have been. And as I might have done had it been left at that. But as I turned to go, I came face to face with my aunt. She, unable to rest indoors, had come out into the garden again. She had to call me by name before I could believe that her cloaked figure had substance and reality. Meeting thus, in the thick of it, so to speak, reserve was no longer possible. And presently she told me everything.

I had seen and experienced enough myself to make that fairly easy. No need then for evasion or pretence. Such comfortable commonplaces as ghosts and a haunted garden did not serve. Her story, or rather its preface—for the action was even now in full swing—was no mere trifling with the fringe of fear. It concerned her vitally, and Aubrey the son she had loved and lost.

There was no doubting that, in every human sense, he was dead. Yet, as she put it, he was more alive now than he had ever been in life. It was no mere accident that had led him, sleep-

clouded, to that pond in the summer dawn. He had gone there in response to an irresistible call. Strange things, indeed, she told me. Of the evil that had come to the garden with that antique statue. Of the fascination it had for the boy. Of her growing anxiety on finding him so often by the fountain, dream-bound in the dusk. Of going to his room at night and finding his bed empty. And of him sleep-walking in the garden many moonlit nights in succession.

I wonder if I should have listened so unquestioningly had she told me these things in the morning sunlight as she had meant to do? I doubt it. Nor perhaps would she have spoken so openly and with such convincing simplicity. But then, even when she went further, I neither doubted nor protested.

She had seen Aubrey for the first time one evening shortly after his death, a shy, elusive figure flitting among the trees at the end of the lawn. He seemed to be aware of her and afraid of her, she said. And, like a timid wild creature, fled to cover at her approach. Two or three times she saw him there. Then several months passed before he came again. All her attempts to get into touch with him were useless. For a long while his only response was to hide. She was afraid the servants would see him or suspect his presence. But that particular fear proved groundless. For at times she saw him pass quite close to people, the maids and visitors too, without their being in the least aware of him.

There were times when she even wondered if

this ghost had any real existence outside her own mind. And tried to comfort herself with the belief that it was mere hallucination, some grief-born fantasy. But that hope was short-lived. For, although he remained shy and elusive, he became more and more objective. He began to come into the house. She would wake in the dawn to find him by her bed. Or in the evenings, as she worked or read, he would appear by the open windows of the drawing-room and watch her intently, suspiciously. As if he meditated doubtful plans that he hardly understood. And when she played on the piano such things as he had liked in life, she would be aware of him at her side, intent, yet always watchful and evasive.

It was then that she began to perceive changes in him. He was not himself, as she put it, but more mature and infinitely less boyish. She felt an antagonism. And when I asked her to explain, she took my arm and did not reply. But looked about her in the darkness as if afraid of being overheard. She had never spoken of this to anyone before. It was as if she had set herself a difficult task and meant to carry it through single-handed, regardless of its imponderable nature or her own distress. I understood that. I remember how I admired her clear constancy. It was never more apparent or more characteristic. Even her most fantastic disclosures had their inevitable place in a reasonable and ordered narrative that drew conviction not only from the way she related it but from what I myself had seen and felt. And its conclusion, when at last I prevailed on her to tell it, even that convinced.

How can I put it into words that will carry any sort of conviction to you? . . .

My cousin Aubrey, an ordinary boy, had died. Tragically, it's true. His ghost had appeared both to her and to me. I say ghost, though it was no mere apparition. No insubstantial thing, I mean. But a palpable and persistent entity having Aubrey's familiar form and likeness, but with strange desires and a definite purpose that were unlike him. At least, my aunt declared that these desires and that purpose were sinister. That they had been acquired, imposed upon him, since he died. He was *possessed*, she said; spirit-bound, held in thrall, if you like—I forget her words—by a water-sprite. This evil thing had come into their lives with that old statue from Italy. It sounds absurd, I know. . . .

But wait! She said that this thing had snared him and now held him, demanding sacrifice, a ransom, to set him free. And I dare say that if you had seen what I had seen you might have believed her too. My own experience at the fountain was fresh enough to keep crude scepticism at bay. I felt it still, all about us, as we walked and whispered.

I suggested that she should come away with me for a time; that we should pack up and go next day. The idea alarmed her. It was the very thing she had feared. She wouldn't hear of it. And something in her protests made me aware that only part of her story had been told. And not the worst. She seemed afraid to speak of it. As if she had not admitted it even to herself. As if her

one hope of helping Aubrey lay in not admitting it, in holding on to normal ways and thoughts, refusing to be stampeded.

I asked her how this idea of ransom and the rest had come to her. What it meant and what she intended to do. Her reply was a sudden, stooping movement and a quiet suppressed cry, as she picked up from the grass at my feet the slim pearl necklace she had given to Aubrey and that had seemed to delight him so. Had I not seen him disappear with it in the pond? Yet here it was, lying on the grass far from the fountain. Rejected! The discovery was too much for her. And for a time nothing I could say or suggest was any use.

I persuaded her at last to come into the house, and lit the lamp. But the efforts she made to recover her composure were mainly for my benefit. I felt that. She begged me to leave things as they were, promising that she would talk it all over with me in the morning and do anything that I suggested. I had great difficulty in getting her to say any more. A strange obstinacy possessed us both. We were suddenly out of sympathy, miles apart, I felt. And I was also rather irritably aware that my insistence merely provoked her to fresh attempts to disarm me, and refused to be deceived by them. My stubbornness won. And at last she told me what I wanted to know.

The discovery of the necklace implied the failure of her last attempt to placate the sprite. She had offered the most valuable thing she possessed. But in vain. The ransom, she now knew, could only be paid in kind. A life for a life. Yes, she said

that. But not her life, she explained, as I looked at her in quick alarm. Whose then? How did she know? What reason had she for translating this nightmare into terms of everyday? She answered these impetuous demands by detailing what had been happening the past few weeks, and how she had come by the knowledge the consequences of which she had sought to evade by means of the necklace.

The last phase had opened a week or so before I arrived. She was sitting alone in the drawing-room one evening waiting for Aubrey to appear. He came, but stayed out in the garden, watching her. For a while she pretended not to see him. Then he came up to the windows, and at last she got up and went to him. For the first time he made no attempt to escape, but stood his ground, smiling at her and holding out his arms. He even allowed her to touch and caress him. His skin was like marble, she said, smooth and cold. And when she spoke to him, he answered, in a strange toneless voice that did not conceal from her an underlying sadness, a childlike, pitiful appeal that wrung her heart. She asked him what he wanted, why he came there like that, what she could do for him? And from his replies she learned what she had told me, of the sprite, the captivity, and the ransom.

When she asked him the nature of that ransom, he didn't speak, but took her hand and pulled at the rings she was wearing. And when she gave him one of them, he ran off with it, apparently delighted. But next morning she found it, or rather the

gardener discovered it, by the fountain. So with the other things she gave him. She made it a practice to get up early, before the servants were about, and recover these discarded things herself. But though she did everything she could to make him say what it was he needed, he behaved as if he didn't know. And it was only by indirect inference, by watching his behaviour closely, that she had come to that dismaying conclusion. She got a book from her bureau and showed me a careful record of all that had happened since.

Aubrey's first appearance, when she spoke to him and he replied, coincided with the birth of a baby to the young wife of the gardener who occupied the lodge at the gate. And every night since, about the same time, he had come to her to renew his demand. I read the list of things she had given him. They ranged from old toys and possessions of his to valuable things of her own, jewelry, certain coins, and classic curios. She had said prayers for him at the fountain and in church. But in vain. Gifts and prayers alike were of no avail.

A kind of mutual deception grew up between them. This also she had noted in her diary. It was deliberate on her part, but half-innocent, she believed, on his. That is to say, he maintained his demands and accepted the things she offered in order to cloak the real issue. Not altogether wilfully. It was as if two natures expressed themselves in him. He, the true Aubrey, seemed to be merely the instrument of his evil genius. But enough of him was allowed to show through to keep

her sympathies poignantly keen, and to act also as a kind of link between him and the life he had lived.

One evening she saw him follow the gardener's wife down the drive after a visit she had paid with her baby to the servants in the house. The sight filled her with alarm. She noted it as a dismaying but significant clue. And next morning she went to the lodge and found the young mother full of a story of having been woken up in the night feeling that something dreadful was happening to the baby. That, on getting a light, she found the child lying wide awake in its cot, smiling and tossing its arms with delight. But when she stooped and spoke, it screamed and, as she said, took against her. My aunt was sympathetically reassuring. Indeed, all this would have passed for nothing but for the suspicions that had taken her to the cottage. These drew new strength from the young mother's story. And subsequent observation convinced her that the baby was in real danger.

Aubrey continued to come to her as before. But she felt more strongly that he was merely deceiving her. She was beset by a double anxiety. To convince him of her love for him and at the same time to counter the evil designs of the sprite. At least, that is my clumsy attempt to express what she so clearly conveyed to me. And as I listened, my interest and concern shifted from these incredible things to her. They failed to maintain their exclusive hold upon my imagination in face of her distress, her vivid personality, and the

familiar realities of the lamp-lighted room. Moreover, her own manner seemed to lose something of its former spontaneity. I hardly know how to express it, but I felt the undercurrent of an ulterior emphasis in her talk, of which she was only half aware. I wonder if I did really feel that at the time, or only after subsequent reflection? I don't know. But I do remember a clear desire to get on to sane, rational things, and back to the easy intimacy that her emotional preoccupation had clouded.

I reasserted my intention to take her away next day, and made the plan as convincing and attractive as I could. Her sudden acquiescence surprised and delighted me. Indeed, her manner as she kissed me good night and held my hands was entirely grateful and reassuring. To-morrow, she agreed, we would do and settle everything. Had I been less tired, her eagerness might have made me suspicious. But having seen her to her room, I turned in with a comparatively light heart and slept soundly. So soundly that I neither dreamed nor was conscious of anything until a loud rapping on the door woke me abruptly to bright sunlight and resentful bewilderment. The maid repeated her tragic summons, driven to fresh extremes of hysterical emphasis by my slowness to take in what she said.

My mind cleared suddenly. And when I went to the window, the little agitated group of servants on the lawn seemed for a dreadful moment like the continuation of a stubborn nightmare. It was too stark a confirmation of the horror the maid had

announced. Indeed, I half believed that going downstairs would disperse it.

When I reached the garden, the weeping servants made way, disclosing the body of my aunt on the grass. Water still ran out of her clothes, making little pools all about her. As I stood there, stunned, little irrelevant things impressed themselves on me. The gestures of the servants. The wet sleeves of the gardener who, five years before, on just such a summer morning, as he reminded me, had taken my cousin Aubrey from the pond. I recall the passionate horror that dilated his brown eyes as he told me this in his slow Sussex. The story of his tragic discovery was like a classic lament, to which the words "the mistress" and "my baby" were the oft-repeated burden. I had not realised till then the completeness of the tragedy. And stooping down I saw the crumpled tiny fingers of the baby clasped so tightly in my aunt's dead arms. The gardener laid an unsteady hand on my shoulder and asserted, over and over again with tremulous bucolic monotony, "'Tis an evil pagan thing! An evil pagan thing!" Thus summing up the disaster in a way that, after all these years, I have not been able to better.

"Oo!" Miss Pogson thrilled. "Thank you, Mr. Brown. I *love* a true ghost story."

"*I* like a *true* ghost story," observed Mr. Buck with crushing crudeness; and then he went off sorrowfully on quite a new tack. "That there garden of your aunt's, Mr. Brown. . . . That's

just the sort I want at Castle Dene, but—but it won't *come* somehow. I've called in landscape gardeners, and I've said, 'I don't want anything *raw*. Get rid of all that. I want that old-world atmosphere straight away.' But I can't get it! And you," he concluded reproachfully, "can go and raise up the 'ole thing jest in a few words."

"*We are the music-makers,*" murmured Vivian Spencer. And added with sly maliciousness: "Possibly your aunt's house is in the market, Peter?"

"N-no," said Mr. Peter Brown, "I'm afraid it isn't."

"You didn't return to the East, Peter?"

"Er—no."

"I'm sorry to hear that your people are dead. Your father—I remember him well. Such a fine old boy. It seems only the other day . . . why, surely it *was* only the other day, Peter——"

"Mr. Spencer, this isn't fair," protested Mrs. Dane-Vereker, rippling her amusement none the less. "If we're all to suffer this sort of inquisition when we've so laboriously worked up our atmosphere—whether old-world or otherwise!" She broke off and turned to Father Anthony. "It's your turn now," she finished.

Father Anthony spoke, not without gravity.

"My tale," he said, "is also tragic. But take my word for it that, without embellishments, it is true."

He felt, perhaps, that they required a corrective. His very tone sobered them. And so, without

any labour at all, he got his atmosphere even before he had opened upon

THE FOURTH DAY'S TALE OF THE PRIEST

THE PRIEST'S TALE

THE LATE EXTRA

By ROBERT KEABLE

FATHER GERARD, an old friend of mine, was a priest of unusual experience, and it was he who told me this story which I shall endeavour to relate as nearly as possible in his own words. At the time of which I am speaking he was getting on in years, and had a parish not far from Bloomsbury, a district which in our London, as you may guess, sees more perhaps of life's tragic humour than any other. East and West the Fates spin many a tangled skein of laughter and tears, but nowhere else quite so frequently may one see how relentless their humour can be. For the folk there are good material for such a jest as one may suppose the devil loves. They are of the sort who struggle hardest to keep up appearances, and who, not having it in them ever to succeed, will not nevertheless drift to the lee shore without a pitiful struggle.

Father Gerard was, however, the right man for that sort of parish. He had been destined for the

law, having come of legal stock, and he had heard confessions and looked into some locked cupboards and learned to be surprised at nothing while as yet the cloth in which I knew him was still uncut. Then, for he had been romantic, he had gone East on some business or another, and now and again one could get from him odd tales of the Levant or of queer doings in the Balkans. What befell him there so wholly to change his profession I have not yet heard, but anyway he returned one day to read for holy orders. Shortly after his ordination he had come to Town, and had settled down in his disappointing parish, where his congregation lived in boarding-houses and had a habit of changing rapidly.

He was set to plough the sand, and he knew it. It was not his way to grumble over-much, but now and again he would let drop some remark which showed he was alive to the hopelessness of his position. Too 'high' for the Establishment, he had not on the other hand those individual, more dramatic gifts which alone enable some Anglican priests to gather about them and hold a congregation through sheer force of personality. Shrewd, kindly, wise, many an odd case however came his way, cases with which he dealt with singular spiritual precision, although so often, as he would himself say, too late.

It was an evening in Lent that he told me this story. I had been preaching for him and had gone in after the short service to supper, rather conscious of the spiritual atmosphere, so to speak, in which I always fancied the church and vicarage

to be set. It was a mid-Victorian monstrosity of a building which had been built and decorated portentously. But it had fallen on evil days, like the neighbourhood. For all that, the begrimed stucco, the disproportioned pillars, and the inadequate sanctuary, to say nothing of the foggy, damp evening, had been lightened by pictures and candles and flowers, as if the church, priest, and sparse congregation alike, aware of failure, had been reaching out after something that had beauty and life, like slum children playing with wilted blooms at the making of a flower garden in a sordid street. The significance of it had struck me anew, and I was so much occupied with my own thoughts that it was not until after supper that I noticed that Father Gerard was more silent than was usual with him.

He was sitting in his cassock in the depths of his arm-chair, smoking steadily, his eyes on the small fire in the grate. I studied him for a few seconds. Then : " Tired ? " I queried.

" Not particularly," he replied, without moving.

" What is it then ? " said I. " There's something on your mind."

In that room in that district the roar of London hardly penetrated. As I looked at him, I could not help thinking how he, in his cassock and this quiet study, stood symbolically aloof from it all. Not far away men drifted up Piccadilly, girls of a certain class walked swiftly through a beat of streets, and the theatres were full. Here——

He interrupted my thoughts. " There is," he said, with a curiously strained intensity in his

words. "This week I almost heard the devil laugh at as pretty a piece of his handiwork as I have ever seen."

"What!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, and laugh last. Or it looks like it. Care to hear? You've a tidy respectable parish in your suburb, and I suppose every tidy house takes in a daily newspaper. My story was in them all this week. In two halves though. It fell to me to piece those halves together and see what God—and the devil—sees. And God being silent as He is traditionally said to be, I cannot help worrying about the ultimate verdict, my friend."

I drew my chair a shade nearer. "Go on," I said.

"Well, it's a long story as They see it, I suppose, though I only came into it a fortnight or so ago, a bit late as usual. I was going out of church after evensong, and I went down the aisle instead of through the sacristy, meaning to go out by the porch as I wanted to post a notice of a meeting there. The lights were nearly all out, and I might easily have missed her, but in the dark, under the west gallery, I thought I saw somebody, and stopped for a second. Then I heard what was unmistakably a sob, and I walked slowly towards the back pew in which a girl was kneeling, huddled together, her face in her hands. She did not hear me approach, and I stood near her for some seconds before I spoke. And when I did so, she looked up at me, and the light fell sufficiently upon her face for me to see her eyes.

"One learns to read eyes, but anyone could have read hers. I could see that she was a quarry, and that the hunt was up. Not a few get run to earth about here, you know. So I did not waste her time or mine. 'Had you not better come with me?' I said as kindly as I could. 'We can't talk in church.'

"She started at that. 'Oh, I can't! I can't!' she cried. 'I must go. Only—only—I—oh, I daren't go home alone just yet.'

"'You need not go yet if you come with me,' I said, 'and you need not tell me anything at all, if you would rather not. But perhaps I could help; a priest can sometimes, you know; and I shouldn't talk to other people about it. It's part of my business not to talk. But that's as you like. What you had best do now, anyway, is to come into the Vicarage and let my maid get you a cup of tea. You're dog-tired, I can see, and probably a cup of tea's just what you want. Will you wait a moment while I pin up my notice? I won't be long.'

"When I got back she was quieter, and had taken a bit of a hold upon the conventionalities. It's pitiful how we poor folks clutch at the conventions to help us. She said something about her being a stranger, and not a churchwoman and quite right now. And she stood up, smiled correctly at me, and put her hat straight with a little touch.

"'Well,' said I, 'don't come if you would rather not. Don't come, either, if you've any other friend you would prefer to go away and talk to.

But take my advice, and talk to somebody to-night. There are some worries it doesn't do to carry alone, for too long anyway.'

" She caught her breath swiftly as I said that, and in a flash was the primitive hunted creature again. 'Oh, I must tell you!' she exclaimed. 'Let me, please let me! There's no one else, and if I don't talk to you I think I shall go mad.'

" So I brought her in here and she sat in your chair—less than a fortnight ago, my friend. Jane made her a cup of tea and I left her alone to drink it. It gave her strength to make up her mind, for when I returned she was resolute enough.

" 'You're a—a priest, aren't you?' she said, getting up as I came in.

" 'Yes,' said I.

" 'Then you hear confessions?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Well, will you hear mine—now, at once?'

" I smiled at her, and sat down in my chair. 'Have you made a confession in your life before?' I asked.

" 'No,' she said.

" 'Well,' said I, 'I should not begin it just now then, if I were you. Not that sort of a confession, I mean. Wait till you know more about it. You're in no condition to undertake it, I fancy. But suppose you sit down in that chair and tell me straight out what's the trouble, while I smoke my pipe, if you'll allow me. If it's a secret, it's safe enough with me, and if you tell it me in that way, it may be more easy for me to help.'

" 'Oh, may I, Father Gerard?' she cried, a ray

of hope momentarily lighting up her face. 'I've heard of you, you know; that's why I'd got as far as the church, but I should never have dared to come and see you. Only, somehow, to-night—well, I couldn't go on longer alone, oh, I couldn't, I couldn't!' And she burst into tears.

"I let her have her cry, filling my pipe and taking her in. She was half hysterical, and in those cases it's no use being too sympathetic. So I knew most of her story before she began. It was written in her face and figure, and in her every conscious motion. She was not exactly pretty, but she had a face that few men could resist and a figure that went with her face. It's curious how some women, and I suppose some men, stir up all the sex passion in others whether they will or no. And when I saw that she wore a few bits of jewellery that were obviously more than she could afford to buy, I had things pretty pat. So, while she told her story, I had leisure to wonder again that the thing which one has heard a hundred times is always the unique tragedy in each life as it comes. She said that she hardly dare tell me; that she supposed I'd never met anyone quite so wicked as she before; and so on. In a sense I scarcely listened at first; I thought it all so commonplace.

"Mary Graham will do for a name. She'd come to town some years before from the Fen country, the daughter of old Puritan stock, and her father and mother were still alive. She loved and feared them, I could see that. 'If daddy knew, Father Gerard,' she said more than once, 'I don't

know what he'd say. It'd kill him, I know it would, oh! I know it would. He mustn't hear—he mustn't, he mustn't! But he will! Oh! how can I stop it? Father Gerard, what shall I do?'

"She had come to Town to earn her living there; had had to, there being neither room nor money at home. Some friend of the family had got her a job as typist in a business office. She sat in a room with half a dozen others for a twelvemonth, but one day she had had to go to a partner's sanctum with a letter, and he had noticed her. A little later his private typist left, and she was moved up into the vacant place. A few shillings more went with the change, which was by way of being a rise, and she was glad to go. She said, and I think truly, that she suspected nothing till the day he kissed her. It took him as long as a month, so she must have been wonderfully simple and straight. I've had girls in here who were ruined in half that time.

"Anyway, that was the end of extra hours through pressure of business, and tea because of the late hours, and finally a taxi home because she was really tired, he could see. Men are curious devils, my friend, spinning their stupid obvious webs. Sticky gossamer, that's all; but it catches flies.

"She left that office. A kiss meant a lot to her. It meant so much that she didn't dare write home about it. It meant so much that she tramped the streets for days to find another job, but finally, when she found one, she was sent back to her employer for a character. He wrote a note and

put it into a fastened envelope, saying, apologetically and kindly, that she must come back and let them start afresh if she couldn't get another place. He'd missed her smart, quick work, and so on——clever, oily devil, you know. And she was sick at heart and tired and frightened, and she thought he meant it and that she had misjudged him. So when they opened the envelope at the new place and regretted that she would not be suitable, she went back.

"From the first moment of her return, he established their relations upon a new footing. He treated her as a friend who had done him a kindness, and Mary Graham hadn't the sense to bolt for it instantly. The poor child had tasted unemployment in this damned city, you see, and of course she no more saw this web than the last. It was all so subtle that she actually fell in love with him, for that's what it came to in the end. She thought him a rattling good sort and she herself a little fool for having flared up so easily. He didn't kiss her again of course, not for a long time. Heavens, no, but he introduced her to his friends, a jolly unconventional lot, men and women both. It was a smart society lady (she said) who used to look in to see 'Jack' in his office and who jokingly condoled with her for having to work for him, who took them both out to lunch together for the first time. How much is hidden in that, I do not know. But after that there were theatres and suppers, and a present or two from Jack that she might smarten herself up, and she actually began to wonder when he would propose.

" She said that even then she would never have gone to the week-end house-party if it had not been that the lady in question asked her. But she knew ' Jack ' was to be there, and by this time she was in love with him. So how much or how little else she knew till she awoke to exact realisation in his bed at four o'clock in the morning, God knows. I did not gather that, and He keeps His secrets. But anyway, at four o'clock, with Jack's arms about her, she saw the stark reality plainly enough.

" But then he spun the last meshes of the web. He loved her; he would marry her—when he could. As it was, for the present, he was married. . . ."

Father Gerard stopped in his story and got up to fetch a drink. " I want it," he said. " I can't get used to these things altogether, commonplace as they are. They leave a nasty taste in the mouth. Mary Graham haunts me especially. She was such a slip of a girl, so obviously emotional, so easy a victim. She never really had a chance, you know. And even if she hadn't partially believed in him and very considerably loved him, still she would scarcely have stood a chance after that night. As it was, he simply sucked her blood at will for the next three years. He had her away again within a month, and after that it was a week-end whenever he pleased. She used to flutter and beat her wings: refusing; protesting; agreeing to go away if he would go simply as a friend; drinking lemonade the first evening; being coaxed into champagne the second; then

surrendering. She was good enough always to be sorry, but not good enough ever to be strong. Towards the end, of course, she became his mistress as wholly as he wished, only trying to assure herself now and again by obtaining his repeated promise that he would marry her when he could. God knows, I would not be harsh, or a Pharisee. That night I gave the fellow the benefit of every doubt. But what a despicable business it is! There are honest sins, but, my friend, in our parish there are sins of which the very devil might be supposed to be ashamed."

"But why," I queried, "had she come to church that evening especially? What had particularly upset her? Had the unexpected happened? Was there a child on the way?"

"Ah," he said, "that's what I asked, of course. Towards the end of her story, she had fallen to tears once more, dwelling, poor child, on those three years and seeing again her growing helplessness; but when I asked her what consummation brought her to me, the tears ceased. She sat up and looked at me, white-faced. The terror grew in her eyes. It's not pleasant to see the eyes of a hunted beast in the face of a young girl, my friend. 'His wife has found out,' she said slowly and as if no more words were needed.

"'Yes, and then?' I asked, as kindlily as I could.

"'She's taking divorce proceedings. He told me to-day, because it will be in the papers soon, and he didn't want me to see it there first. Think of it, Father Gerard, my name will be there!

She's had him watched, Father Gerard. Oh my God, I don't know *what* they've seen! I've read these things about other people, and—and—oh, perhaps a man has been spying on us all the time! Last summer, by the sea, there was a man who came on us suddenly after we'd been bathing. We thought there was nobody about; it was in a little sheltered place among the rocks; and I hadn't minded what he did. He'd—he'd—he'd taken off——' And she covered her face with her hands. 'I can't tell you,' she whispered. 'He used to like that sort of thing.'

"'Don't, Mary,' said I. 'All that isn't necessary.'

"'Yes, I know,' she cried, starting up, her terror banishing her shame, 'but perhaps that man was a spy, father. He'll tell what he saw; it'll be in all those awful papers; every detail will be in it; daddy'll read it, and read my name. Oh, father, father, I'll go mad I think. What can I do, what can I do?' And she flung herself back in her chair, staring at me wild-eyed.

"Well, what could I say? Of course I told her that I didn't think it likely, but that even if so, she must be prepared to go through with it. And I repeated some platitude or other about God and forgiveness, and should have known it to be a platitude even if she hadn't interrupted me.

"'What if I killed her?' she suddenly demanded quietly, without moving, her eyes blazing in her white face.

"I don't know what it was about Mary Graham—a trick of my imagination perhaps or her genuine

innocence—but I cannot recollect having stared so straight at utter despair and horror as I did that night in this very room a fortnight ago. It was still as it is now, and her soul in its agony seemed almost to have escaped from its prison. The way she cut across my conventional talk played its part too. At grips with reality she set my words so easily on one side. I stared at her, and saw a murderess if ever man has seen one. Those little gloved hands of hers, folded in her lap, would have tightened remorselessly around that other woman's throat, if in so doing she could have found escape—that I saw. She was, perhaps, insane; who shall say? When a man or a woman can look death—theirs or another's—in the face, and see in it release, is he or she any longer a reasonable being?

"But I do not think I gave myself away. Possibly the clock ticked loudly alone for longer than an ordinary break in a conversation, but I was able, when I spoke, to avoid expressing the terror I felt. 'Perhaps you have killed her already?' I questioned. I remember I began to re-fill my pipe to hide the way I hung upon her answer.

"'No, no,' she whispered. 'But if it would keep my name out of the papers, for daddy's sake——'

"'Well, give up all thought of it,' said I. 'It would not do the least good, and certainly your name would be in the papers thereafter. As it is, who can say? Give me the names, and I will see what I can do.'

" ' What could you do ? ' she demanded.

" ' I do not know,' I said honestly. ' But I can see your friend at least.'

" She jumped to her feet. ' I won't,' she cried fiercely, ' I won't do that. He has been good to me, and he shall not think that I too betrayed him. Besides, what could you do ? You would preach to him, that is all. Let me go. I was a fool to come here. There's nothing you can do. My God, my God, why was I born ? '

" When a woman asks that, and means it, you have bottomed human sorrow, my friend."

Gerard had a way of saying things, and a little silence fell on us. A taxi went by and pulled up nearly opposite, and we could hear brief sounds—a man's voice, a girl's laughter, and then, quite clearly, " Good-bye. Be good ! " and the slam of a door. The car started again noisily, hooted at the corner, and the sound of its engine died into silence.

Gerard seemed to wait for it to go. Then he characteristically shrugged his shoulders as if at his own thoughts, and spoke again. " I did what I could, of course. We need not dwell on that. In the end, she was less hysterical I thought, penitent, brave. I saw her home : she lived near. She said she would let me know what happened next, and I thought she meant it.

" Perhaps she did ; perhaps she did not ; though I still think she meant to do so. But the climax came too suddenly. Anyway it was—let me see—yes, eight days after, last Friday to be exact, that I had my next news. It was after

supper, about nine o'clock, and I was reading. There came a knock and a ring, and then a knock again. I myself opened the door.

"There was a police constable on the step. 'Rev. Mr. Gerard?' he inquired.

"'Yes.'

"'You're wanted, sir. There's a girl took poison, No. 80, Fitzroy Square, and she wants you. Doctor says she's dying. Name of Mary Graham. I said I'd come as you was near.'

"I went exactly as I was, in my cassock and slippers through the night, and London struck me as very lovely as I went. It was a clear evening and the stars shone serene. The dark streets were peaceful, hugging their secrets in the way they do, and there was a merry little wind and a flicker of moon that made the roof-tops mysterious and magical against the sky. A car or two passed us, rolling swiftly and smoothly by, and at one corner we could see a brilliantly lit thoroughfare with a suggestion of gaiety in its light.

"Mary had a back room near the top of a gaunt house that had once been fashionable, of course, like all our neighbourhood. Doors were ajar on the landings which opened stealthily wider as we passed, and the landlady met us half-way up in a hysterical cross between passion and pity. 'For it to have happened in my house!' she cried. 'I never would have believed! Always been respectable, I have. And the poor thing looks that awful, sir. . . .' But needless to say, I didn't wait to hear her.

"Mary lay half undressed upon her bed, the

doctor with her. The constable gave a glance within and then shut the door behind me, barring himself and the landlady out. I walked quickly to the bed and saw that her eyes were shut and she breathing heavily. The doctor's hand was still pressed firmly upon her bared arm, the little syringe half hid in his fingers.

"He looked at me and nodded. I knew him and we did not need words. I remember I glanced surreptitiously round the room once, and took it all in: the wall-paper of strings of little roses; Queen Alexandra and her dogs over the mantel-shelf; the deal dressing-table littered with trinkets; the washhand-stand with a yellow jug; Mary's dress and corsets on one chair where she had thrown them; a cupboard half open, a silk frock half visible within; a little table by the bed with a man's portrait in a silver frame; a vase of flowers beside it. There lay on the table, also, a small bottle, overturned on its side, and beneath it a glass that had fallen and broken on the floor. Between the bed and window a gas jet was rather too fully turned on. It had been lit hurriedly, and it hissed a little.

"Anderson rose and came across to me. 'I fear it's not over yet,' he whispered. 'I can do nothing to save her though. The next spasm will kill her. She will be violent, Gerard; can you help, or shall I call in the constable?'

"I couldn't speak, but I shook my head. I had a stupid feeling that she would dislike the policeman being present. Then I went and knelt on rather a pretty scrap of rug she had by the bed-side, and

I took the hand that hung listlessly down. There was a hideous purple smear about her mouth, and a stain low down on her white throat and on the laces there. The sweat stood in beads on her breast. Yet, though I have not seen many more awful sights perhaps than that, I hardly noticed those things. Old man as I am, I noticed the way the hair curled over her little ear, and the pity of it took me by the heart.

" It may have been five minutes before—well, before the beginning of the end. She recognised me, and, although she could hardly trickle words through her burned throat, she whispered : ' I heard them calling—the paper—to-night. Don't —tell—anyone.' A shudder ran through her as the pain gripped her again. ' Oh, pray—quick, quick—pray. . . . Oh God ! oh hell !——'

" My friend, I think, before it was over, that I, a priest, implored the doctor to kill her, and as I look back I hope he did what he could. I shut my eyes before the end ; I could not help it. When I got up I saw that I must have kicked over the little table as I wrestled with her on my side of the bed, and that the vase and the portrait lay on the floor, the flowers in a pool of water. His face looked up at me. I took a step forward and ground my heel savagely into it.

" ' Take care, man,' said Anderson from the other side. ' Go steady ; it's over now. You've trodden on that photograph.' His words pulled me together quickly enough.

" ' So I have,' I replied, stooping for it. ' It's hopelessly spoiled, I fear.'

"I picked up the thing, and seeing that I had put my foot in the face and ground the glass in, you could not easily recognise it. It was safer to take out the photo, however, and drop the smashed fragments of glass into the fire-place. The frame I put on the dressing-table. The silver was but little bent.

"When I turned back, Anderson had drawn a sheet over her and there was no more to be done. We left together, passing through a small white-faced crowd in the hall below who had not been able to endure the cries. He went one way, I another. At the corner I spoke of, from which you could see the brightly lit street, I hesitated, and then turned down towards the stream of people. The traffic came and went, of course, just as usual, and the people were passing ceaselessly. I fancy I was only thinking that their companionship would be pleasant, but as I reached the lights a newspaper-boy came by, wading up the street with his poster about his legs. 'Late Extra,' he was shouting. '*City Magnate's Divorce. All the Details,*' said the placard.

"I bought a copy, and heedless of the fact that I was in my cassock, I stopped under the first street-lamp to read the news. There were a couple of columns of it. I scanned them quickly, but not so quickly that I could not see that there were details enough, and letters.

"Then I think the print danced a little before my eyes. I saw so many other things more plainly. Mary had been, perhaps, coming home; as likely as not they had delayed a little in his office;

maybe she had got out of the Underground at this station, and in this very street had seen the poster. 'All the Details!' It was as if her shame were placarded there. Yes, but she had had no need to buy a paper to see those details. So luridly they stood out before her in her imagination, that she had rushed straight home and swallowed the contents of that little bottle without a further thought save only of escape. And when the agony gripped her remorselessly, how the devil must have laughed!"

Father Gerard laughed a little himself, and he is a man who rarely does so. But there was no merriment in his laugh. I stared at him, slightly puzzled. "I don't quite see . . ." I began.

He cut me short. "No, no, of course; but listen. There were details you see, right enough, details enough for any divorce. Names, too, were there, compromising the man beyond all question. Only not her name. Got that? *Not her name.* He had not even been true to Mary Graham, and it was the story of his liaison with another woman before which Mary had fled to die."

I sat on in my chair, finding no words to say. Father Gerard got up and stretched himself wearily. "You see, a half-penny would have saved her—the price of that Late Extra," he said in a changed voice. "But it's late, and I'm dog-tired. And if I keep you here talking much longer, you'll miss your train."

"'Orrible," said the Master Printer. "I feel —I feel quite 'arrowed. . . ."

And he evidently was.

Mrs. Dane-Vereker laughed softly.

"Then you now know a little, Mr. Buck," she said, "what *I* felt over that tale of yours about Andrew Niggs."[1]

"This is different," protested Mr. Buck. "This is far worse. That pore gurl!..." He broke off. It was the second time that evening that his chivalrous, sentimental feelings had been shocked. "Men like that . . . men like that . . ." he tried and failed again, though Miss Pogson thought she heard him feebly murmuring, "'ell-'ounds."

Father Anthony gazed at him, incredulous and hopeless. He feared, on reasonable grounds, that Mr. Buck himself might so easily prove to be a "man like that." "Why doesn't some power the giftie gie us——?" he thought; and immediately broke off to beat his breast with a *tu quoque* and a there-but-for-the-grace-of-God.

"Come now," said the Lady of Fashion, "we're getting morbid. I'm going to supply the corrective. Only a fantasy, Father Anthony; but a counterblast."

And without further apology she slipped into

THE FOURTH DAY'S TALE OF THE LADY OF FASHION

[1] See Vol. II of *The New Decameron*.

THE TALE OF THE LADY OF FASHION

THE LAST LAUGH

By D. H. LAWRENCE

THERE was a little snow on the ground, and the church clock had just struck midnight. Hampstead in the night of winter for once was looking pretty, with clean white earth and lamps for moon, and dark sky above the lamps.

A confused little sound of voices, a gleam of hidden yellow light. And then the garden door of a tall, dark Georgian house suddenly opened, and three people confusedly emerged. A girl in a dark blue coat and fur turban, very erect: a fellow with a little dispatch-case, slouching: a thin man with a red beard, bareheaded, peering out of the gateway down the hill that swung in a curve downwards towards London.

"Look at it! A new world!" cried the man in the beard, ironically, as he stood on the step and peered out.

"No, Lorenzo! It's only whitewash!" cried the young man in the overcoat. His voice was handsome, resonant, plangent, with a weary sar-

donic touch. As he turned back his face was dark in shadow.

The girl with the erect, alert head, like a bird, turned back to the two men.

"What was that?" she asked, in her quick, quiet voice.

"Lorenzo says it's a new world. I say it's only whitewash," cried the man in the street.

She stood still and lifted her woolly, gloved finger. She was deaf and was taking it in.

Yes, she had got it. She gave a quick, chuckling laugh, glanced very quickly at the man in the bowler hat, then back at the man in the stucco gateway, who was grinning like a satyr and waving good-bye.

"Good-bye, Lorenzo!" came the resonant, weary cry of the man in the bowler hat.

"Good-bye!" came the sharp, night-bird call of the girl.

The green gate slammed, then the inner door. The two were alone in the street, save for the policeman at the corner. The road curved steeply downhill.

"You'd better mind how you *step*!" shouted the man in the bowler hat, leaning near the erect, sharp girl, and slouching in his walk. She paused a moment, to make sure what he had said.

"Don't mind me, I'm quite all right. Mind yourself!" she said quickly. At that very moment he gave a wild lurch on the slippery snow, but managed to save himself from falling. She watched him, on tiptoes of alertness. His bowler hat bounced away in the thin snow. They were

under a lamp near the curve. As he ducked for his hat he showed a bald spot, just like a tonsure, among his dark, thin, rather curly hair. And when he looked up at her, with his thick black brows sardonically arched, and his rather hooked nose self-derisive, jamming his hat on again, he seemed like a satanic young priest. His face had beautiful lines, like a faun, and a doubtful martyred expression. A sort of faun on the Cross, with all the malice of the complication.

"Did you hurt yourself?" she asked, in her quick, cool, unemotional way.

"No!" he shouted derisively.

"Give me the machine, won't you?" she said, holding out her woolly hand. "I believe I'm safer."

"Do you *want* it?" he shouted.

"Yes, I'm sure I'm safer."

He handed her the little brown dispatch-case, which was really a Marconi listening machine for her deafness. She marched erect as ever. He shoved his hands deep in his overcoat pockets and slouched along beside her, as if he wouldn't make his legs firm. The road curved down in front of them, clean and pale with snow under the lamps. A motor-car came churning up. A few dark figures slipped away into the dark recesses of the houses, like fishes among rocks above a sea-bed of white sand. On the left was a tuft of trees sloping upwards into the dark.

He kept looking around, pushing out his finely shaped chin and his hooked nose as if he were listening for something. He could still hear the

motor-car climbing on to the Heath. Below was the yellow, foul-smelling glare of the Hampstead Tube station. On the right the trees.

The girl, with her alert pink-and-white face looked at him sharply, inquisitively. She had an odd nymph-like inquisitiveness, sometimes like a bird, sometimes a squirrel, sometimes a rabbit: never quite like a woman. At last he stood still, as if he would go no farther. There was a curious, baffled grin on his smooth, cream-coloured face.

"James," he said loudly to her, leaning towards her ear. "Do you hear somebody *laughing*?"

"Laughing?" she retorted quickly. "Who's laughing?"

"I don't know. *Somebody!*" he shouted, showing his teeth at her in a very odd way.

"No, I hear nobody," she announced.

"But it's most *extraordinary*!" he cried, his voice slurring up and down. "Put on your machine."

"Put it on?" she retorted. "What for?"

"To see if you can *hear* it," he cried.

"Hear what?"

"The *laughing*. Somebody laughing. It's most *extraordinary*."

She gave her odd little chuckle and handed him her machine. He held it while she opened the lid and attached the wires, putting the band over her head and the receivers at her ears, like a wireless operator. Crumbs of snow fell down the cold darkness. She switched on: little yellow lights in glass tubes shone in the machine. She was connected, she was listening. He stood with

his head ducked, his hands shoved down in his overcoat pockets.

Suddenly he lifted his face and gave the weirdest, slightly neighing laugh, uncovering his strong, spaced teeth and arching his black brows, and watching her with queer, gleaming, goat-like eyes.

She seemed a little dismayed.

"There!" he said. "Didn't you hear it?"

"I heard *you*!" she said, in a tone which conveyed that *that* was enough.

"But didn't you hear *it*?" he cried, unfurling his lips oddly again.

"No!" she said.

He looked at her vindictively, and stood again with ducked head. She remained erect, her fur hat in her hand, her fine bobbed hair banded with the machine-band and catching crumbs of snow, her odd, bright-eyed, deaf nymph's face lifted with blank listening.

"There!" he cried, suddenly jerking up his gleaming face. "You mean to tell me you can't ——" He was looking at her almost diabolically. But something else was too strong for him. His face wreathed with a startling, peculiar smile, seeming to gleam, and suddenly the most extraordinary laugh came bursting out of him, like an animal laughing. It was a strange, neighing sound, amazing in her ears. She was startled, and switched her machine quieter.

A large form loomed up: a tall, clean-shaven young policeman.

"A radio?" he asked laconically.

"No, it's my machine. I'm deaf!" said Miss

James quickly and distinctly. She was not the daughter of a peer for nothing.

The man in the bowler hat lifted his face and glared at the fresh-faced young policeman with a peculiar white glare in his eyes.

"Look here!" he said distinctly. "Did you hear someone laughing?"

"Laughing! I heard you, sir."

"No, *not* me." He gave an impatient jerk of his arm, and lifted his face again. His smooth, creamy face seemed to gleam, there were subtle curves of derisive triumph in all its lines. He was careful not to look directly at the young policeman. "The most extraordinary laughter I ever heard," he added, and the same touch of derisive exultation sounded in his tones.

The policeman looked down on him cogitatingly.

"It's perfectly all right," said Miss James coolly. "He's not drunk. He just hears something that we don't hear."

"Drunk!" echoed the man in the bowler hat, in profoundly amused derision. "If I were merely drunk——" And off he went again in the wild, neighing, animal laughter, while his averted face seemed to flash.

At the sound of the laughter something roused in the blood of the girl and of the policeman. They stood nearer to one another, so that their sleeves touched and they looked wonderingly across at the man in the bowler hat. He lifted his black brows at them.

"Do you mean to say you heard nothing?" he asked.

"Only you," said Miss James.

"Only you, sir!" echoed the policeman.

"What was it like?" asked Miss James.

"Ask me to *describe* it!" retorted the young man, in extreme contempt. "It's the most marvellous sound in the world."

And truly he seemed wrapped up in a new mystery.

"Where does it come from?" asked Miss James, very practical.

"*Apparently*," he answered in contempt, "from over there." And he pointed to the trees and bushes inside the railings over the road.

"Well, let's go and see!" she said. "I can carry my machine and go on listening."

The man seemed relieved to get rid of the burden. He shoved his hands in his pockets again and sloped off across the road. The policeman, a queer look flickering on his fresh young face, put his hand round the girl's arm carefully and subtly, to help her. She did not lean at all on the support of the big hand, but she was interested, so she did not resent it. Having held herself all her life intensely aloof from physical contact, and never having let any man touch her, she now, with a certain nymph-like voluptuousness, allowed the large hand of the young policeman to support her as they followed the quick wolf-like figure of the other man across the road uphill. And she could feel the presence of the young policeman, through all the thickness of his dark-blue uniform, as something young and alert and bright.

When they came up to the man in the bowler hat, he was standing with his head ducked, his ears pricked, listening beside the iron rail inside which grew big black holly-trees tufted with snow, and old, ribbed, silent English elms.

The policeman and the girl stood waiting. She was peering into the bushes with the sharp eyes of a deaf nymph, deaf to the world's noises. The man in the bowler hat listened intensely. A lorry rolled downhill, making the earth tremble.

"There!" cried the girl, as the lorry rumbled darkly past. And she glanced round with flashing eyes at her policeman, her fresh soft face gleaming with startled life. She glanced straight into the puzzled, amused eyes of the young policeman. He was just enjoying himself.

"Don't you see?" she said, rather imperiously.

"What is it, Miss?" answered the policeman.

"I mustn't point," she said. "Look where I look."

And she looked away with brilliant eyes, into the dark holly bushes. She must see something, for she smiled faintly, with subtle satisfaction, and she tossed her erect head in all the pride of vindication. The policeman looked at her instead of into the bushes. There was a certain brilliance of triumph and vindication in all the poise of her slim body.

"I always knew I should see him," she said triumphantly to herself.

"Whom do you see?" shouted the man in the bowler hat.

"Don't you see him too?" she asked, turning

round her soft, arch, nymph-like face anxiously. She was anxious for the little man to see.

"No, I see nothing. What do you see, James?" cried the man in the bowler hat, insisting.

"A man."

"Where?"

"There. Among the holly bushes."

"Is he there now?"

"No! He's gone."

"What sort of a man?"

"I don't know."

"What did he look like?"

"I can't tell you."

But at that instant the man in the bowler hat turned suddenly, and the arch, triumphant look flew to his face.

"Why, he must be *there*!" he cried, pointing up the grove. "Don't you hear him laughing? He must be behind those trees."

And his voice, with curious delight, broke into a laugh again, as he stood and stamped his feet on the snow, and danced to his own laughter, ducking his head. Then he turned away and ran swiftly up the avenue lined with old trees.

He slowed down as a door at the end of a garden path, white with untouched snow, suddenly opened, and a woman in a long-fringed black shawl stood in the light. She peered out into the night. Then she came down to the low garden gate. Crumbs of snow still fell. She had dark hair and a tall dark comb.

"Did you knock at my door?" she asked of the man in the bowler hat.

"I? No!"

"Somebody knocked at my door."

"Did they? Are you sure? They can't have done. There are no footmarks in the snow."

"Nor are there!" she said. "But somebody knocked and called something."

"That's very curious," said the man. "Were you expecting someone?"

"No. Not exactly expecting anyone. Except that one is always expecting Somebody, you know." In the dimness of the snow-lit night he could see her making big, dark eyes at him.

"Was it someone laughing?" he said.

"No. It was no one laughing, exactly. Some one knocked, and I ran to open, hoping as one always hopes, you know——"

"What?"

"Oh—that something wonderful is going to happen."

He was standing close to the low gate. She stood on the opposite side. Her hair was dark, her face seemed dusky, as she looked up at him with her dark, meaningful eyes.

"Did you wish someone would come?" he asked.

"Very much," she replied, in her plangent Jewish voice. She must be a Jewess.

"No matter who?" he said, laughing.

"So long as it was a man I could like," she said in a low, meaningful, falsely shy voice.

"Really!" he said. "Perhaps after all it was I who knocked—without knowing."

"I think it was," she said. "It must have been."

"Shall I come in?" he asked, putting his hand on the little gate.

"Don't you think you'd better?" she replied.

He bent down, unlatching the gate. As he did so the woman in the black shawl turned and, glancing over her shoulder, hurried back to the house, walking unevenly in the snow, on her high-heeled shoes. The man hurried after her, hastening like a hound to catch up.

Meanwhile the girl and the policeman had come up. The girl stood still when she saw the man in the bowler hat going up the garden walk after the woman in the black shawl with the fringe.

"Is he going in?" she asked quickly.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said the policeman.

"Does he know that woman?"

"I can't say. I should say he soon will," replied the policeman.

"But who is she?"

"I couldn't say who she is."

The two dark, confused figures entered the lighted doorway, then the door closed on them.

"He's gone," said the girl outside on the snow. She hastily began to pull off the band of her telephone-receiver, and switched off her machine. The tubes of secret light disappeared, she packed up the little leather case. Then, pulling on her soft fur cap, she stood once more ready.

The slightly martial look which her long, dark-blue, military-seeming coat gave her was intensified, while the slightly anxious, bewildered look of her face had gone. She seemed to stretch herself, to stretch her limbs free. And the inert

look had left her full soft cheeks. Her cheeks were alive with the glimmer of pride and a new dangerous surety.

She looked quickly at the tall young policeman. He was clean-shaven, fresh-faced, smiling oddly under his helmet, waiting in subtle patience a few yards away. She saw that he was a decent young man, one of the waiting sort.

The second of ancient fear was followed at once in her by a blithe, unaccustomed sense of power.

"Well!" she said. "I should say it's no use waiting." She spoke decisively.

"You don't have to wait for him, do you?" asked the policeman.

"Not at all. He's much better where he is." She laughed an odd, brief laugh. Then glancing over her shoulder, she set off down the hill, carrying her little case. Her feet felt light, her legs felt long and strong. She glanced over her shoulder again. The young policeman was following her, and she laughed to herself. Her limbs felt so lithe and so strong, if she wished she could easily run faster than he. If she wished she could easily kill him, even with her hands.

So it seemed to her. But why kill him? He was a decent young fellow. She had in front of her eyes the dark face among the holly bushes, with the brilliant, mocking eyes. Her breast felt full of power, and her legs felt long and strong and wild. She was surprised herself at the strong, bright, throbbing sensation beneath her breasts, a sensation of triumph and of rosy anger. Her

hands felt keen on her wrists. She who had always declared she had not a muscle in her body! Even now, it was not muscle, it was a sort of flame.

Suddenly it began to snow heavily, with fierce frozen puffs of wind. The snow was small, in frozen grains, and hit sharp on her face. It seemed to whirl round her as if she herself were whirling in a cloud. But she did not mind. There was a flame in her, her limbs felt flamey and strong, amid the whirl.

And the whirling, snowy air seemed full of presences, full of strange unheard noises. She was used to the sensation of noises taking place which she could not hear. This sensation became very strong. She felt something was happening in the wild air.

The London air was no longer heavy and clammy, saturated with ghosts of the unwilling dead. A new, clean tempest swept down from the Pole, and there were noises.

Voices were calling. In spite of her deafness she could hear someone, several voices, calling and whistling, as if many people were hallooing through the air:

"He's come back! Aha! He's come back!"

There was a wild, whistling, jubilant sound of voices in the storm of snow. Then obscured lightning winked through the snow in the air.

"Is that thunder and lightning?" she asked of the young policeman, as she stood still, waiting for his form to emerge through the veil of whirling snow.

"Seems like it to me," he said.

And at that very moment the lightning blinked again, and the dark, laughing face was near her face, it almost touched her cheek.

She started back, but a flame of delight went over her.

"There!" she said. "Did you see that?"

"It lightened," said the policeman.

She was looking at him almost angrily. But then the clean, fresh animal look of his skin, and the tame-animal look in his frightened eyes amused her, she laughed her low, triumphant laugh. He was obviously afraid, like a frightened dog that sees something uncanny.

The storm suddenly whistled louder, more violently, and, with a strange noise like castanets, she seemed to hear voices clapping and crying:

"He is here! He's come back!"

She nodded her head gravely.

The policeman and she moved on side by side. She lived alone in a little stucco house in a side street down the hill. There was a church and a grove of trees and then the little old row of houses. The wind blew fiercely, thick with snow. Now and again a taxi went by, with its lights showing weirdly. But the world seemed empty, uninhabited save by snow and voices.

As the girl and the policeman turned past the grove of trees near the church, a great whirl of wind and snow made them stand still, and in the wild confusion they heard a whirling of sharp, delighted voices, something like seagulls, crying:

"He's here! He's here!"

"Well, I'm jolly glad he's back," said the girl calmly.

"What's that?" said the nervous policeman, hovering near the girl.

The wind let them move forward. As they passed along the railings it seemed to them the doors of the church were open, and the windows were out, and the snow and the voices were blowing in a wild career all through the church.

"How extraordinary that they left the church open!" said the girl.

The policeman stood still. He could not reply.

And as they stood they listened to the wind and the church full of whirling voices all calling confusedly.

"*Now* I hear the laughing," she said suddenly.

It came from the church: a sound of low, subtle, endless laughter, a strange, naked sound.

"Now I hear it!" she said.

But the policeman did not speak. He stood cowed, with his tail between his legs, listening to the strange noises in the church.

The wind must have blown out one of the windows, for they could see the snow whirling in volleys through the black gap, and whirling inside the church like a dim light. There came a sudden crash, followed by a burst of chuckling, naked laughter. The snow seemed to make a queer light inside the building, like ghosts moving, big and tall.

There was more laughter, and a tearing sound. On the wind, pieces of paper, leaves of books,

came whirling among the snow through the dark window. Then a white thing, soaring like a crazy bird, rose up on the wind as if it had wings, and lodged on a black tree outside, struggling. It was the altar-cloth.

There came a bit of gay, trilling music. The wind was running over the organ-pipes like pan-pipes, quickly up and down. Snatches of wild, gay, trilling music, and bursts of the naked low laughter.

"Really!" said the girl. "This is most extraordinary. Do you hear the music and the people laughing?"

"Yes, I hear somebody on the organ!" said the policeman.

"And do you get the puff of warm wind? Smelling of spring. Almond blossom, that's what it is! A most marvellous scent of almond blossom. *Isn't* it an extraordinary thing!"

She went on triumphantly past the church, and came to the row of little old houses. She entered her own gate in the little railed entrance.

"Here I am!" she said finally. "I'm home now. Thank you very much for coming with me."

She looked at the young policeman. His whole body was white as a wall with snow, and in the vague light of the arc-lamp from the street his face was humble and frightened.

"Can I come in and warm myself a bit?" he asked humbly. She knew it was fear rather than cold that froze him. He was in mortal fear.

"Well!" she said. "Stay down in the sitting-room if you like. But don't come upstairs,

because I am alone in the house. You can make up the fire in the sitting-room, and you can go when you are warm."

She left him on the big, low couch before the fire, his face bluish and blank with fear. He rolled his blue eyes after her as she left the room. But she went up to her bedroom, and fastened her door.

In the morning she was in her studio upstairs in her little house, looking at her own paintings and laughing to herself. Her canaries were talking and shrilly whistling in the sunshine that followed the storm. The cold snow outside was still clean, and the white glare in the air gave the effect of much stronger sunshine than actually existed.

She was looking at her own paintings, and chuckling to herself over their comicalness. Suddenly they struck her as absolutely absurd. She quite enjoyed looking at them, they seemed to her so grotesque. Especially her self-portrait, with its nice brown hair and its slightly opened rabbit-mouth and its baffled, uncertain rabbit eyes. She looked at the painted face and laughed in a long, rippling laugh, till the yellow canaries like faded daffodils almost went mad in an effort to sing louder. The girl's long, rippling laugh sounded through the house uncannily.

The housekeeper, a rather sad-faced young woman of a superior sort—nearly all people in England are of the superior sort, superiority being an English ailment—came in with an inquiring and rather disapproving look.

"Did you call, Miss James?" she asked loudly.

"No. No, I didn't call. Don't shout, I can hear quite well," replied the girl.

The housekeeper looked at her again.

"You knew there was a young man in the sitting-room?" she said.

"No. Really!" cried the girl. "What, the young policeman? I'd forgotten all about him. He came in in the storm to warm himself. Hasn't he gone?"

"No, Miss James."

"How extraordinary of him! What time is it? Quarter to nine! Why didn't he go when he was warm? I must go and see him, I suppose."

"He says he's lame," said the housekeeper censoriously and loudly.

"Lame! That's extraordinary. He certainly wasn't last night. But don't shout. I can hear quite well."

"Is Mr. Marchbanks coming in to breakfast, Miss James?" said the housekeeper, more and more censorious.

"I couldn't say. But I'll come down as soon as mine is ready. I'll be down in a minute, anyhow, to see the policeman. Extraordinary that he is still here."

She sat down before her window, in the sun, to think a while. She could see the snow outside, the bare, purplish trees. The air all seemed rare and different. Suddenly the world had become quite different: as if some skin or integument had broken, as if the old, mouldering London

sky had crackled and rolled back, like an old skin, shrivelled, leaving an absolutely new blue heaven.

"It really is extraordinary!" she said to herself. "I certainly saw that man's face. What a wonderful face it was! I shall never forget it. Such laughter! He laughs longest who laughs last. He certainly will have the last laugh. I like him for that: he will laugh last. Must be someone really extraordinary! How very nice to be the one to laugh last. He certainly will. What a wonderful being! I suppose I must call him a being. He's not a person exactly.

But how wonderful of him to come back and alter all the world immediately! *Isn't* that extraordinary. I wonder if he'll have altered Marchbanks. Of course Marchbanks never *saw* him. But he heard him. Wouldn't that do as well, I wonder!—I *wonder!*"

She went off into a muse about Marchbanks. She and he were *such* friends. They had been friends like that for almost two years. Never lovers. Never that at all. But *friends*.

And after all, she had been in love with him: in her head. This seemed now so funny to her: that she had been, in her head, so much in love with him. After all, life was too absurd.

Because now she saw herself and him as such a funny pair. He so funnily taking life terribly seriously, especially his own life. And she so ridiculously *determined* to save him from himself. Oh, how absurd! *Determined* to save him from himself, and wildly in love with him in the effort. The determination to save him from himself.

Absurd! Absurd! Absurd! Since she had seen the man laughing among the holly-bushes—*such* extraordinary, wonderful laughter—she had seen her own ridiculousness. Really, what fantastic silliness, saving a man from himself! Saving anybody. What fantastic silliness! How much more amusing and lively to let a man go to perdition in his own way. Perdition was more amusing than salvation anyhow, and a much better place for most men to go to.

She had never been in love with any man, and only spuriously in love with Marchbanks. She saw it quite plainly now. After all, what nonsense it all was, this being-in-love business. Thank goodness she had never made the humiliating mistake.

No, the man among the holly-bushes had made her see it all so plainly: the ridiculousness of being in love, the *infra dig.* business of chasing a man or being chased by a man.

"Is love *really* so absurd and *infra dig.*?" she said aloud to herself.

"Why of course!" came a deep, laughing voice.

She started round, but nobody was to be seen.

"I expect it's that man again!" she said to herself. "It really *is* remarkable, you know. I consider it's a remarkable thing that I never really wanted a man, *any* man. And there I am over thirty. It *is* curious. Whether it's something wrong with me, or right with me, I can't say. I don't know till I've proved it. But I believe, if that man kept on laughing something would happen to me."

She smelt the curious smell of almond blossom in the room, and heard the distant laugh again.

" I do wonder why Marchbanks went with that woman last night—that Jewish-looking woman. Whatever could he want of her?—or she him? So strange, as if they both had made up their minds to something! How extraordinarily puzzling life is! So messy, it all seems.

" Why does nobody ever laugh in life like that man. He *did* seem so wonderful. So scornful! And so proud! And so real! With those laughing, scornful, amazing eyes, just laughing and disappearing again. I can't imagine him chasing a Jewish-looking woman. Or chasing any woman, thank goodness. It's all *so* messy. My policeman would be messy if one would let him: like a dog. I do dislike dogs, really I do. And men do seem so doggy!——"

But even while she mused, she began to laugh again to herself with a long, low chuckle. How wonderful of that man to come and laugh like that and make the sky crack and shrivel like an old skin! Wasn't he wonderful! Wouldn't it be wonderful if he just touched her. Even touched her. She felt, if he touched her, she herself would emerge new and tender out of an old, hard skin. She was gazing abstractedly out of the window.

" There he comes, just now," she said abruptly. But she meant Marchbanks, not the laughing man.

There he came, his hands still shoved down in his overcoat pockets, his head still rather furtively ducked, in the bowler hat, and his legs still rather shambling. He came hurrying across the road,

not looking up, deep in thought, no doubt. Thinking profoundly, with agonies of agitation, no doubt about his last night's experience. It made her laugh.

She, watching from the window above, burst into a long laugh, and the canaries went off their heads again.

He was in the hall below. His resonant voice was calling, rather imperiously:

"James! Are you coming down?"

"No," she called. "You come up."

He came up two at a time, as if his feet were a bit savage with the stairs for obstructing him.

In the doorway he stood staring at her with a vacant, sardonic look, his grey eyes moving with a queer light. And she looked back at him with a curious, rather haughty carelessness.

"Don't you want your breakfast?" she asked. It was his custom to come and take breakfast with her each morning.

"No," he answered loudly. "I went to a tea-shop."

"Don't shout," she said. "I can hear you quite well."

He looked at her with mockery and a touch of malice.

"I believe you always could," he said, still loudly.

"Well, anyway, I can now, so you needn't shout," she replied.

And again his grey eyes, with the queer, greyish phosphorescent gleam in them, lingered malignantly on her face.

"Don't look at me," she said calmly. "I know all about everything."

He burst into a pouf of malicious laughter.

"Who taught you—the policeman?" he cried.

"Oh, by the way, he must be downstairs! No, he was only incidental. So, I suppose, was the woman in the shawl. Did you stay all night?"

"Not entirely. I came away before dawn. What did you do?"

"Don't shout. I came home long before dawn." And she seemed to hear the long, low laughter.

"Why, what's the matter!" he said curiously. "What have you been doing?"

"I don't quite know. Why?—are you going to call me to account?"

"Did you hear that laughing?"

"Oh yes. And many more things. And saw things too."

"Have you seen the paper?"

"No. Don't shout, I can hear."

"There's been a great storm, blew out the windows and doors of the church outside here, and pretty well wrecked the place."

"I saw it. A leaf of the church Bible blew right in my face: from the Book of Job——" she gave a low laugh.

"But what else did you see?" he cried loudly.

"I saw *him*."

"Who?"

"Ah, that I can't say."

"But what was he like?"

"That I can't tell you. I don't really know."

"But you must know. Did your policeman see him too?"

"No, I don't suppose he did. My policeman!" And she went off into a long ripple of laughter. "He is by no means mine. But I *must* go downstairs and see him."

"It's certainly made you very strange," Marchbanks said. "You've got no *soul*, you know."

"Oh, thank goodness for that!" she cried. "My policeman has one, I'm sure. *My policeman!*" And she went off again into a long peal of laughter, the canaries pealing shrill accompaniment.

"What's the matter with you?" he said.

"Having no soul. I never had one really. It was always fobbed off on me. Soul was the only thing there was between you and me. Thank goodness it's gone. Haven't you lost yours? The one that seemed to worry you, like a decayed tooth?"

"But what are you *talking* about?" he cried.

"I don't know," she said. "It's all so extraordinary. But look here, I *must* go down and see my policeman. He's downstairs in the sitting-room. You'd better come with me."

They went down together. The policeman, in his waistcoat and shirt-sleeves, was lying on the sofa, with a very long face.

"Look here!" said Miss James to him. "Is it true you're lame?"

"It is true. That's why I'm here. I can't walk," said the fair-haired young man as tears came to his eyes.

"But how did it happen? You weren't lame last night," she said.

"I don't know how it happened—but when I woke up and tried to stand up, I couldn't do it." The tears ran down his distressed face.

"How very extraordinary!" she said. "What can we do about it?"

"Which foot is it?" asked Marchbanks. "Let us have a look at it."

"I don't like to," said the poor devil.

"You'd better," said Miss James.

He slowly pulled off his stocking, and showed his white left foot curiously clubbed, like the weird paw of some animal. When he looked at it himself, he sobbed.

And as he sobbed, the girl heard again the low, exulting laughter. But she paid no heed to it, gazing curiously at the weeping young policeman.

"Does it hurt?" she asked.

"It does if I try to walk on it," wept the young man.

"I'll tell you what," she said. "We'll telephone for a doctor, and he can take you home in a taxi."

The young fellow shamefacedly wiped his eyes.

"But have you no idea how it happened?" asked Marchbanks anxiously.

"I haven't myself," said the young fellow.

At that moment the girl heard the low, eternal laugh right in her ear. She started, but could see nothing.

She started round again as Marchbanks gave a strange, yelping cry, like a shot animal. His white face was drawn, distorted in a curious grin,

that was chiefly agony but partly wild recognition. He was staring with fixed eyes at something. And in the rolling agony of his eyes was the horrible grin of a man who realises he has made a final, and this time fatal, fool of himself.

"Why," he yelped in a high voice, "I knew it was he!" And with a queer shuddering laugh he pitched forward on the carpet and lay writhing for a moment on the floor. Then he lay still, in a weird, distorted position, like a man struck by lightning.

Miss James stared with round, staring brown eyes.

"Is he dead?" she asked quickly.

The young policeman was trembling so that he could hardly speak. She could hear his teeth chattering.

"Seems like it," he stammered.

There was a faint smell of almond blossom in the air.

"Delightful," said Vivian Spencer.

"Damnable," said Father Anthony. "Er—I—I beg your pardon. A fantasy, you said. Even so, not entirely the kind that I can approve."

"My dear lady," said the Professor, unexpectedly awake, and twinkling at her benignly. "I do not suppose you are aware that those were actually the Echinades that we passed close to this morning. But Father Anthony may rest assured that I failed to hear, alas, like those mariners of whom Plutarch tells, any voice that cried, 'Great Pan is alive again!' Still, a very curious coincidence. Or

do you, my dear Scott, infallibly detect the emanation of some subtle psychological influence which——"

His voice was tailing gently away as the Master Printer interrupted.

"I don't understand a word you're talking about," he cried. "And as for that tale, what was it all about? I couldn't make nothing of it —except," he corrected himself, "that it was *downright improper*. If that's the way peers' daughters act and think—well, it rather takes the wind out of what I was going to tell you myself. *You* know. . . ." He endeavoured to look significant. He even ventured a very lavish wink, since Judas was seated well away on his flank. "'Owever . . ." he said, seeing that he had got their attention; and with that began

THE FOURTH DAY'S TALE OF THE MASTER PRINTER

THE MASTER PRINTER'S TALE

LA DAME AUX JARRETIÈRES

By BLAIR

WHEN I get back to Roxminster, I shall be able to say, "If you *want* to know 'ow to see ler gay Paree, you'd better ask *me*."

One night, ladies and gents, after I'd seen Mrs. D.-V. and Miss Pogson back to their hotel, as in duty bound, off I went to a little place Turpin had told me of, where he was coming to have a bit of fluff for a bit of supper, so to speak, after he'd similarly disposed of Dr. Pennock and the rest of you.

Well, I was there first, and I took a table. It was the kind of place where the necks of the gals' dresses are about as low as the price of fizz is high, and, if you know the ropes, you hold on to 'em hard all the time—the necks of the bottles, I mean, not the gals'—'cause they have their orders from the management to bump against the tables as

the dance goes on and the joy is unconfined, so as to upset the bottles and make you order more.

When I say the necks of the gals' dresses were low, I'm doing 'em an injustice perhaps. Fact is, they hadn't got no necks—not behind, that is. Two strings of beads over the shoulders hitched on to the top of the dress behind at the waist—where it started. Not that it had far to go. Some of 'em, being modest—or else artfuller—had 'em long enough to cover the knee-cap. Some didn't. One of 'em, if you'll believe me, and one only—I bet she was the artfullest of the lot—was in a dress you'd let your own daughter go to a Primitive Methodist Chapel in on a windy Sunday: black velvet, with 'ardly even a collar-bone showing round the neck, and right down to her ankles—yes, she was the artfullest, she was! . . .

I never saw her stranded the whole of the time I was there—waiting for old Turps to turn up. And—this just proves it—next table to mine there was a feller with a gal who'd gone all the other way, if any one had—"*you've* cut your skirt accordin' to your cloth," was what I thought when I first began to notice 'er—which was just after the feller had got up and left her point-blank to go and grab a dance with the modest-looking young woman in black velvet. I didn't blame his taste for the change, for the gal he'd left behind him was not so much a minx to look at as a devil. I don't mean the right kind of devil—I mean the hellcat-temper kind—and wasn't she just looking it at that moment!

And then she caught sight of me looking at her, and she changed all at once, and smiled.

"'Ullo!" I said to myself. "Elf, my boy, you've clicked." And I looked away at once—just for the fun of seeing 'ow far she'd go if she wasn't encouraged. That's always my way with 'em, that is. Besides, she wasn't my sort at all: too many claws about her.

Then I had another look at her—wasn't meaning to catch her eye, you know, but just took a glance across at . . . at her format in full calf. Ha! *She* was in black too, but one of the leggy sort. And her dress, what there was of it, was pretty well fluffed up like a pierrette's with touches of red about it—as wicked-looking as you please.

Well, she sees as I've glanced across at her without looking at her, so what does she do but just find that her stocking wanted pulling up—so's I should see her scarlet garter.

I looked away again at once and drank a drop of fizz. Then I pretended to be stealing another look; and no sooner did she catch me at it than she repeated the operation—displayed garter as per previously.

Laugh? I was shaking all over inside of me, I was—it was as good as a play. It was a thing you could calculate on, like crossing your legs and hitting yourself on the knee-cap to make your foot jump. It was her . . . I don't know how to put it . . . eh, what?—is that what you call it?—yes, I've heard the word: her "reactions" that I was so sure of. I did it a third time: it was like pulling the string of a marionette. She did

it again, and whether she thought I wanted working up a bit—the frigid Britisher and all that—I don't know, but anyway she did it fine an' thorough.

"Poor gal!" I thought. "After all this, it's only decent to make some sort of acknowledgment of your kind attentions." So I just transferred my glance to her face and give her a friendly grin—knowing-like, you know.

But that did it. That was enough for her. Before you could say "knife" she was sitting at my table, pouring herself out the last glass of fizz that I was trying to keep for old Turps.

"*Cheri,*" she says, speaking slow and distinct—the brazen hussy!—so that even I, who don't perfess to be any great shakes with French, you know, could take it in—"*Cheri,*" she says, "*ou ally vous sussoir?*"

I never heard such cheek! I give you my word, believe it or not, but before I had time to think I'd looked round—quite instinctive-like—for a policeman. That's what a good upbringing does for you.

Well, I had to say something, so I cleared my throat and pulled myself together and said:

"*Etes-vous oon cocotte—oon song-culotte?*"

I don't know what she answered, because just at that moment, over her head, I saw old Turps coming towards my table. He'd just spotted me.

Well, I was rather pleased about that, because I thought I was showing him I knew how to get on a bit by myself.

So, when he stopped, polite-like, seeing the gal sitting opposite me, I called out,

"Come on, Turps! It's all right. I've clicked. She wears red garters and shows 'em, so I'm sure I needn't introduce you."

(That's what's called *bonhomie* and *savez-vous-faire*, you know, in the underworld.)

And then he saw her face—and, my God, you should have seen *his*! His eyes started in his head with horror. And she was just the same—struck all of a heap and glaring like a cat.

"Lord!" I thought, "I must have been and put my foot into some little *liaisiong* of Turps's own."

And then he screeched.

"Introduce me?" says old Turps. "How did you find her? And like this!"

"Find who?" I says. "Tell me who she is first. I 'ope I haven't——"

But before I got any further he came out with it.

"It's Jezebel!" he said. "You know: his wife! Madame Judas! And like this!"

"*What*!" I says. "'Is wife? But you said she was respectable—*boorshoy*" (meaning, I take it, burjoice). . . .

A screech from Miss Pogson.

"Oh, mind, Mr. Buck!—Mind!"

On his flank Judas had arisen. Portentous, ponderable, he took bulk above him.

The Master Printer saw the menace. He tried hastily to scramble out of his deck-chair. But deck-chairs, when at the lower and more comfortable angles—and particularly when occupied by stoutish gentlemen in the unaccustomed

panoply of evening-dress—are none too easily scrambled out of: still more particularly, it may be added, when the midriff of any such stoutish gentleman meets in rising the opposition of a foot, which presses it back, with intent to do so. . . .

The Master Printer collapsed into his chair again. Then again Miss Pogson screeched, beholding on a sudden movement by Judas, a knife in his hand—a table knife (purloined, no doubt, from the galley). She did more than screech. She hurled herself forward and clutched with both hands the wrist of the hand that held the knife, before it could be raised to do injury to Mr. Buck. She flung herself from her chair to her knees upon the deck, so that the whole weight of her body came upon the wrist of Judas, fatally dragging down his right arm for a few moments ere he could wrench free.

(Herein is the eternal curiousness of things. It was Mr. Buck who had arranged her chair for her. He was just in that state of sympathetic attentiveness which such actions imply. She had prevented him, with some difficulty, from insisting on putting it at a low and comfortable angle, and had prevailed on him to put it as upright as possible; because she meant to eschew femininity and assume armipotent dowdiness. She was in just that state of flagellative austerity. She had weakened towards Mr. Buck, and she knew that he had weakened towards her. And ever since she had gone below to dress for dinner she had told herself that it wouldn't do—that she ought to be ashamed of herself—she hadn't

meant to make an appeal to anybody's pity. . . . And yet, all the same, dreadful person though he might be, he *was* kind and she couldn't help liking him. . . . And thus she was enabled, there's some probability, to save his life. Had Buck had his way, she could never have flung herself forward out of the chair on to the dagger-hand of Judas: submissive to the temptation of getting him, she would have lost him; and, throwing away her cake, she was like to have it returned to her.)

By the time he had freed himself, Mr. Buck—everybody—were on their feet. Judas shook Miss Pogson aside, but, almost as he did so, the great fist of the Master Printer smote him and cannoned him back upon Turpin. He lost his balance and went sprawling, losing his grip upon the knife. It fell to the deck close by Dr. Pennock, who promptly put her foot on it.

"Leave 'im alone! leave 'im alone!" shouted Mr. Buck, prancing and squaring like a man new-made. "Let 'im get up, the dirty Dago. Get up and put 'em up, you 'ound!"

Judas rose slowly to his feet. For one moment he seemed inclined to accept the challenge. But, whether it was the spectacle of the Master Printer's pugnacity, so sheerly joyous, or the feel of the Master Printer's fist on the side of his jaw that decided him, he suddenly decided to drop hostilities.

"Excuse me," he said, in undeniable English, made them a slight bow, and beat a retreat round the bulk of the companion to the other side of the deck.

" There now ! " cried Mr. Buck triumphantly. " Thought I could make him give himself away ! That wasn't 'arf a bad clip on the side of the jaw, neither, considering——" he went on to say, when he was interrupted by the sound of a splash.

Pell-mell they rushed across. Judas had disappeared. Below the yacht the water was profoundly dark. But, not far away, the light of a lantern on some native caique had now appeared, making a faint, softly moving radiance.

" Man overboard ! " yelled Mr. Peter Brown.

A hubbub of cries and questions arose. Could he swim ? He could swim like a fish : fat men always could. Then, had he fallen overboard or dived ? Anyway, he must be recaptured. Suppose he got away ? Perhaps he had seen the light and would swim for that ? How long would they be launching that boat ?

The boat was launched at last—but it seemed that a long time had elapsed. Gradually, as the sound of its oars grew fainter, so too the noise of the tourists died away. And, with the cessation of their own noise while they listened to the beat of the oars, they became aware of the latter as but an accentuation of the silence of the night. They listened. The whole austerity and dignity of eternal space beat down upon their senses, belittling cruelly their silly crawling congeries of human stuff and fact and feeling.

A cold little breeze had begun to come down from the mountains. The light across the waters moved and was gone.